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LEONORA.

BY

MISS EDGEWORTH.

77296

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

" ——— Il cieco scoglio
È quel ch'inganna i marinari ancora
Più saggi. Chi non sà finger l'amico,
Non è fiero nemico."

London:
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1806.

are the most treacherous gifts of Heaven. Why should we cultivate talents merely to gratify the caprice of tyrants? Why seek for knowledge which can prove only, that our wretchedness is irremediable? If a ray of light break in upon us, it is but to make darkness more visible, to show us the narrow limits, the Gothic structure, the impenetrable barriers of our prison. Forgive me if on this subject I cannot speak—if I cannot think—with patience. Is it not fabled, that the gods, to punish some refractory mortal of the male kind, doomed his soul to inhabit upon earth a female form? A punishment more degrading, or more difficult to endure, could scarcely be devised by cruelty omnipotent. What dangers, what sorrows, what persecutions, what nameless evils await the woman,

who dares to rise above the prejudices of her sex!

"Ah! happy they, the happiest of their kind!"

who, without a struggle, submit their reason to be swathed by all the absurd bandages of custom. What though they cripple or distort their minds; are not these deformities beauties in the eye of fashion? and are not these people the favoured nurslings of the *World*, secure of her smiles, her caresses, her fostering praise, her partial protection, through all the dangers of youth and all the dotage of old age?

"Ah! happy they, the happiest of their kind!"

who learn to speak, and think, and act by rote; who have a phrase, or a maxim, or a formula ready for every occasion; who follow—

"All the nurse, and all the priest have taught."

And is it possible that Olivia can envy these *tideless-blooded* souls their happiness—their apathy? Is her high spirit so broken by adversity? Not such the promise of her early years, not such the language of her unsophisticated heart! Alas! I scarcely know, I scarcely recollect, that proud self, which was wont to defy the voice of opinion, and to set at nought the decrees of prejudice. The events of my life shall be related, or rather the history of my sensations; for in a life like mine sensations become events; a metamorphosis which you will see in every page of my history. I feel an irresistible impulse to open my whole heart to you, my dear Leonora. I ought to be awed by the superiority of your understanding and of your character, yet there is an indulgence in your nature, a softness in your temper, that dis-

sipates fear, and irresistibly attracts confidence.

You have generously refused to be prejudiced against me by busy, malignant rumour; you have resolved to judge of me for yourself. Nothing, then, shall be concealed. In such circumstances I cannot seek to extenuate any of my faults or follies. I am ready to acknowledge them all with self-humiliation more poignant than the sarcasms of my bitterest enemies. But I must pause till I have summoned courage for my confession. Dear Leonora adieu.

OLIVIA.

LETTER II.

Olivia to Leonora.

April 30th.

FULL of life and spirits, with a heart formed for all the enthusiasm, for all the delicacy of love, I married early, in the fond expectation of meeting a heart suited to my own.—Cruelly disappointed, I found—merely a husband. My heart recoiled upon itself; true to my own principles of virtue, I scorned dissimulation. I candidly confessed to my husband, that my love was extinguished. I proved to him, alas! too clearly, that we were not born for each other. The attractive moment of illusion was past—never more to return. The repulsive reality remained. The living was chained to the dead, and, by the inexorable

tyranny of English laws, that chain, eternally galling to innocence, can be severed only by the desperation of vice. Divorce, according to our barbarous institutions, cannot be obtained without guilt. Appalled at the thought, I saw no hope but in submission. Yet to submit to live with the man I could not love, was, to a mind like mine, impossible. My principles and my feelings equally revolted from this legal prostitution. We separated. I sought for balm to my wounded heart in foreign climes.

To the beauties of nature I was ever feelingly alive. Amidst the sublime scenes of Switzerland, and on the consecrated borders of her classic lakes, I sometimes forgot myself to happiness. Felicity, how transient!—transient as the day-dreams that played upon my

fancy in the bright morning of love. Alas! not all creation's charms could soothe me to repose. I wandered in search of that which change of place cannot afford. There was an aching void in my heart—an indescribable sadness over my spirits. Sometimes I had recourse to books; but how few were in unison with my feelings, or touched the trembling chords of my disordered mind! Common place morality I could not endure. History presented nothing but a mass of crimes. Metaphysics promised some relief, and I bewildered myself in their not inelegant labyrinth. But to the bold genius and exquisite pathos of some German novelists I hold myself indebted for my largest portion of ideal bliss; for those rapt moments, when sympathy with kindred

souls transported me into better worlds, and consigned vulgar realities to oblivion.

I am well aware, my Leonora, that you approve not of these my favourite writers: but yours is the morality of one, who has never known sorrow. I also would interdict such cordials to the happy. But would you forbid those to taste felicity in dreams, who feel only misery when awake? Would you dash the cup of Lethe from lips, to which no other beverage is salubrious or sweet?

By the use of these opiates my soul gradually settled into a sort of pleasing pensive melancholy. Has it not been said, that melancholy is a characteristic of genius? I make no pretensions to genius: but I am persuaded, that melancholy is the habitual, perhaps the

natural state of those who have the misfortune to feel with delicacy.

You, my dear Leonora, will class this notion amongst what you once called my refined errors. Indeed I must confess, that I see in you an exception so striking as almost to compel me to relinquish my theory. But again let me remind you, that your lot in life has been different from mine. Alas! how different! Why had not I such a friend, such a mother as yours, early to direct my uncertain steps and to educate me to happiness? I might have been . . . But no matter what I might have been! . . . I must tell you what I have been.

Separated from my husband, without a guide, without a friend at the most perilous period of my life, I was left to that most

insidious of counsellors—my own heart—my own weak heart. When I was least prepared to resist the impression, it was my misfortune to meet with a man of a soul congenial to my own. Before I felt my danger, I was entangled beyond the possibility of escape. The net was thrown over my heart; its struggles were to no purpose, but to exhaust my strength. Virtue commanded me to be miserable—and I was miserable. But do I dare to expect your pity, Leonora, for such an attachment? It excites your indignation, perhaps your horror. Blame, despise, detest me; all this would I rather bear than deceive you into fancying me better than I really am.

Do not, however, think me worse. If my views had been less pure, if I had felt less reliance on the firmness of my own principles, and less repugnance to

artifice, I might easily have avoided some appearances, which have injured me in the eyes of the world. With real contrition I confess, that a fatal mixture of masculine independence of spirit, and of female tenderness of heart, has betrayed me into many imprudencies: but of vice, and of that meanest species of vice, hypocrisy, I thank Heaven, my conscience can acquit me. All I have now to hope is, that you, my indulgent, my generous Leonora, will not utterly condemn me. Truth and gratitude are my only claims to your friendship—to a friendship, which would be to me the first of earthly blessings, which might make me amends for all I have lost. Consider this before, unworthy as I am, you reject me from your esteem. Counsel, guide, save me! Without vanity, but with confidence I say it, I have a

heart that will repay you for affection. You will find me easily moved, easily governed by kindness. Yours has already sunk deep into my soul, and your power is unlimited over the affections, and over the understanding of

Your obliged

OLIVIA.

LETTER III.

From Lady Leonora L—— to her Mother the Duchess of ——, enclosing the preceding Letters.

May 2d.

I AM permitted to send you, my dear mother, the enclosed letters. Mixed with what you may not approve, you will, I think, find in them proofs of an affectionate heart and superior abilities. Lady Olivia is just returned to England. Scandal, imported from the Continent, has had such an effect in prejudicing many of her former friends and acquaintance against her, that she is in danger of being excluded from that society of which she was once the ornament and the favourite: but I am determined to support her cause, and to do every thing in my power to counteract

the effects of malignity. I cannot sufficiently express the indignation, that I feel against the mischievous spirit of scandal, which destroys happiness at every breath, and which delights in the meanest of all malignant feelings, the triumph over the errors of superior characters. Olivia has been much blamed, because she has been much envied.

Indeed, my dear mother, you have been prejudiced against her by false reports. Do not imagine that her fascinating manners have blinded my judgment: I assure you that I have discerned, or rather that she has revealed to me, all her faults; and ought not this candour to make a strong impression upon my mind in her favour? Consider how young, how beautiful she was at her first entrance into fashionable life; how much exposed to temptation, surrounded by

flatterers, and without a single friend. I am persuaded that she would have escaped all censure, and would have avoided all the errors with which she now reproaches herself, if she had been blessed with a mother such as mine.

LEONORA L-

LETTER IV.

The Duchess of—— to her Daughter.

MY DEAREST CHILD, May 5th.

I MUST answer your last before I sleep—before I can sleep in peace. I have just finished reading the rhapsody which it enclosed; and whilst my mind is full and warm upon the subject, let me write, for I can write to my own satisfaction at no other time. I admire and love you, my child, for the generous indignation you express against those who trample upon the fallen, or who meanly triumph over the errors of superior genius; and if I seem more cold, or more severe, than you wish me to be, attribute this to my anxiety for your happiness, and to that caution which is perhaps the infirmity of age.

In the course of my long life I have, alas! seen Vice and Folly dressed in so many different fashions, that I can find no difficulty in detecting them under any disguise; but your unpractised eyes are almost as easily deceived as when you were five years old, and when you could not believe that your pasteboard Nun was the same person in her various changes of attire.

Nothing would tempt you to associate with those who have avowed themselves regardless of right and wrong; but I must warn you against another, and a far more dangerous class, who professing the most refined delicacy of sentiment, and boasting of invulnerable virtue, exhibit themselves in the most improper and hazardous situations; and who, because they are without fear, expect to be deemed free from reproach. Either from miraculous good fortune, or from a singularity of temper,

these adventurous heroines may possibly escape with what they call perfect innocence.—So much the worse for society.—Their example tempts others, who fall a sacrifice to their weakness and folly. I would punish the tempters in this case more than the victims, and for them the most effectual species of punishment is contempt. Neglect is death to these female lovers of notoriety. The moment they are out of fashion, their power to work mischief ceases. Those who from their character and rank have influence over public opinion, are bound to consider these things in the choice of their associates. This is peculiarly necessary in days when attempts are made to level all distinctions. You have sometimes hinted to me, my dear daughter, with all proper delicacy, that I am too strict in my notions, and that, unknown to myself, my pride mixes

with morality. Be it so: the pride of family, and the pride of virtue, should reciprocally support each other. Were I asked what I think the best guard to a nobility in this, or in any other country, I should answer, VIRTUE. I admire that simple epitaph in Westminster Abbey on the Duchess of Newcastle:—"Her name was Margaret Lucas, youngest sister to the Lord Lucas of Colchester;—a noble family, for all the brothers were valiant and all the sisters virtuous."

I look to the temper of the times in forming rules for conduct. Of late years we have seen wonderful changes in female manners. I may be like the old Marquis in Gil Blas, who contended that even the peaches of modern days had deteriorated: but I fear that my complaints of the degeneracy of human kind are better founded than his fears for the vegetable

creation. A taste for the elegant profligacy of French gallantry was, I remember, introduced into this country before the destruction of the French monarchy. Since that time, some sentimental writers and pretended philosophers of our own and foreign countries have endeavoured to confound all our ideas of morality. To every rule of right they have found exceptions, and on these they have fixed the public attention by adorning them with all the splendid decorations of eloquence; so that the rule is despised or forgotten, and the exception triumphantly established in its stead. These orators seem as if they had been feed by Satan to plead the cause of Vice; and as if possessed by the evil spirit, they speak with a vehemence which carries away their auditors, or with a subtlety which deludes their better judgment. They put

extreme cases, in which virtue may become vice, or vice virtue: they exhibit criminal passions in constant connexion with the most exalted, the most amiable virtues; thus making use of the best feelings of human nature for the worst purposes, they engage pity or admiration perpetually on the side of guilt. Eternally talking of philosophy and philanthropy, they only borrow the terms to perplex the ignorant and seduce the imaginative. They have their systems and their theories, and in theory they pretend that the general good of society is their sole immutable rule of morality, and in practice they make the variable feelings of each individual the judges of this general good. Their systems disdain all the vulgar virtues, intent upon some *beau ideal* of perfection or perfectibility. They set common sense and common honesty

at defiance. No matter:—their doctrine, so convenient to the passions and soporific to the conscience, can never want partisans: especially by weak and enthusiastic women it is adopted and propagated with eagerness; then they become personages of importance, and zealots in support of their sublime opinions:—and they can read; and they can write; and they can talk; and they can *effect a revolution in public opinion!* I am afraid, indeed, that they can: for of late years we have heard more of sentiment than of principles; more of the rights of woman than of her duties. We have seen talents disgraced by the conduct of their possessors, and perverted in the vain attempt to defend what is unjustifiable.

Where must all this end?—where the abuse of reason inevitably ends, in the

ultimate law of force. If in this age of reason women make a bad use of that power which they have obtained by the cultivation of their understanding, they will degrade and enslave themselves beyond redemption; they will reduce their sex to a situation worse than it ever experienced even in the ages of ignorance and superstition. If men find that the virtue of women diminishes in proportion as intellectual cultivation increases, they will connect, fatally for the freedom and happiness of our sex, the ideas of female ignorance and female innocence; they will decide that one is the effect of the other. They will not pause to distinguish between the use and the abuse of reason; they will not stand by to see further experiments tried at their expense, but they will prohibit knowledge altogether as a pernicious

commodity, and will exert all the superior power which nature and society place in their hands, to enforce their decrees. Opinion obtained freedom for women; by opinion they may be again enslaved. It is therefore the interest of the female world, and of society, that women should be deterred by the dread of shame from passing the bounds of discretion. No false lenity, no partiality in favour of amusing talents or agreeable manners, should admit of exceptions which become dangerous examples of impunity. The rank, and superior understanding of a *delinquent* ought not to be considered in mitigation, but as aggravating circumstances. Rank makes ill conduct more conspicuous: talents make it more dangerous. Women of abilities, if they err, usually employ all their powers to justify, rather

than to amend their faults. Other women go wrong from weakness, they from principle.

I am afraid, my dear daughter, that my general arguments are closing round your Olivia. But I must bid you a good night, for my poor eyes will serve me no longer. God bless you, my dear child.

LETTER V.

Leonora to her Mother.

May 12th.

I AGREE with you, my dear mother, that in these times especially, it is incumbent upon all persons, whose rank or reputation may influence public opinion, to be particularly careful to support the cause of female honour, of virtue, and religion. With the same object in view, we may however differ in the choice of means for its attainment. Pleasure as well as pain acts upon human creatures; and therefore, in governing them, may not reward be full as efficacious as punishment? Our sex are sufficiently apprised of the fatal consequences of ill conduct; the advantages of well-earned reputation should be at least

as great, as certain, and as permanent.

In former times, a single finger pointed at the scutcheon of a knight challenged him to defend his fame; but the defiance was open, the defence was public; and if the charge proved groundless, it injured none but the malicious accuser. In our days, female reputation, which is of a nature more delicate than the honour of any knight, may be destroyed by the finger of private malice. The whisper of secret scandal, which admits of no fair or public answer, is too often sufficient to dishonour a life of spotless fame. This is the height, not only of injustice, but of impolicy. Women will become indifferent to reputation, which it is so difficult, even by the prudence of years, to acquire, and which it is so easy to lose in a moment, by the malice

or thoughtlessness of those, who invent or who repeat scandal. Those who call themselves the world, often judge without listening to evidence, and proceed upon suspicion with as much promptitude and severity as if they had the most convincing proofs. But because Cæsar, nearly two thousand years ago, said that a woman ought not even to be suspected, and divorced his wife upon the strength of this sentiment, shall we make it a general maxim, that suspicion justifies punishment? We might as well applaud those, who when their friends are barely suspected to be tainted with the plague, drive them from all human comfort and assistance.

Even where women, from the thoughtless gayety of youth, or the impulse of inexperienced enthusiasm, may have given some slight cause for censure, I

would not have Virtue put on all her gorgon terrors, nor appear circled by the vengeful band of prudes; her chastening hand will be more beneficially felt if she wear her more benign form. To place the imprudent in the same class with the vicious, is injustice and impolicy: were the same punishment and the same disgrace to be affixed to small and to great offences, the number of *capital* offenders would certainly increase. Those who were disposed to yield to their passions, would, when they had once failed in exact decorum, see no motive, no fear to restrain them; and there would be no pause, no interval between error and profligacy. Amongst females who have been imprudent, there are many things to be considered which ought to recommend them to mercy. The judge, when he is obliged to pronounce the im-

mutable sentence of the law, often, with tears, wishes that it were in his power to mitigate the punishment; but the decisions of opinion may and must vary with circumstances, else the degree of reprobation which they inflict cannot be proportioned to the offence, or calculated for the good of society. Among the mitigating circumstances I should be inclined to name even those which you bring in aggravation. Talents, and what is called genius, in our sex are often connected with a warmth of heart, an enthusiasm of temper, which expose to dangers from which the coldness of mediocrity is safe. In the illuminated palace of ice, the lights which render the spectacle splendid, and which raise the admiration of the beholders, endanger the fabric and tend to its destruction.

But you will tell me, dear mother,

that allusion is not argument—and I am almost afraid to proceed, lest you should think me an advocate for vice. I would not shut the gates of mercy, inexorably and indiscriminately, upon all those of my own sex, who have even been *more than imprudent.*

"He taught them shame, the sudden sense of ill—
Shame, Nature's hasty conscience, which forbids
Weak inclination ere it grows to will,
Or stays rash will before it grows to deeds."

Whilst a woman is alive to shame, she cannot be dead to virtue. But, by injudicious or incessant reproach, this principle, even where it is most exquisite, may be most easily destroyed. The mimosa, when too long exposed to each rude touch, loses its retractile sensibility. It ought surely to be the care of the wise and benevolent to cherish that principle, implanted in our nature

as the guard of virtue, that principle upon which legislators rest the force of punishment, and all the grand interests of society.

My dear mother, perhaps you will be surprised at the style in which I have been writing, and you will smile at hearing your Leonora discuss the duties of legislators, and the grand interests of society. She has not done so from presumption, or from affectation. She was alarmed by your supposing that her judgment was deluded by fascinating manners, and she determined to produce *general* arguments, to convince you that she is not actuated by particular prepossession. You see that I have at least some show of reason on *my* side. I have forborne to mention Olivia's name: but now that I have obviated, I hope by reasoning, the imputation of partiality,

I may observe that all my arguments are strongly in her favour. She has been attacked by slander; *the world* has condemned her upon suspicion merely. She has been imprudent; but I repeat in the strongest terms, that I am *convinced of her innocence;* and that I should bitterly regret, that a woman with such an affectionate heart, such uncommon candour, and such superior abilities, should be lost to society.

Tell me, my dear mother, that you are no longer in anxiety about the consequences of my attachment to Olivia.

Your affectionate daughter,

LEONORA.

LETTER VI.

The Duchess of —— to her Daughter.

May 20th.

YOU lament, my dear child, that such an affectionate heart, such great abilities as Olivia's, should be lost to society. Before I sympathize in your pity, my judgment must be convinced that it is reasonable.

What proofs has Lady Olivia given of her affectionate heart? She is at variance with both her parents; she is separated from her husband; and she leaves her child in a foreign country, to be educated by strangers. Am I to understand, that her ladyship's neglecting to perform the duties of a daughter, a wife, and a mother, are proofs of an affectionate heart? As to her superior talents, do

they contribute to her own happiness, or to the happiness of others? Evidently not to her own; for, by her account of herself, she is one of the most miserable wretches alive! She tells you that "*she went to foreign climes in search of balm for a wounded heart, and wandered from place to place, looking for what no place could afford.*" She talks of "*indescribable sadness—an aching void—an impenetrable prison—darkness visible—dead bodies chained to living ones;*" and she exhibits all the disordered furniture of a "diseased mind." But you say, that though her powers are thus insufficient to make herself happy, they may amuse or instruct the world; and of this I am to judge by the letters which you have sent me. You admire fine writing; so do I. I class eloquence high amongst the fine arts. But by eloquence I mean some-

thing more than Dr. Johnson defines it to be, "the art of speaking with fluency and elegance." This is an art which is now possessed to a certain degree by every boarding school Miss. Every scribbling young lady can now string sentences and sentiments together, and can turn a period harmoniously. Upon the strength of these accomplishments they commence heroines, and claim the privileges of the order; privileges which go to an indefinite and most alarming extent. Every heroine may have her own code of morality for her private use, and she is to be tried by no other; she may rail as loudly as she pleases "at the barbarous institutions of society," and may deplore "*the inexorable tyranny of the English laws.*" If she find herself involved in delicate entanglements of crossing duties, she may break

through any one, or all of them, to extricate herself with a noble contempt of prejudice.

I have promised to reason calmly; but I cannot repress the terror which I feel at the idea of my daughter's becoming the friend of one of these women. Olivia's letters are, I think, in the true heroine style; and they might make a brilliant figure in a certain class of novels. She begins with a bold exclamation on "the misfortune of being born a woman!—*the slave or the outcast of society, condemned to incessant hypocrisy!*" Does she mean modesty? Her manly soul feels it "*the most degrading punishment that omnipotent cruelty could devise, to be imprisoned in a female form.*" From such a masculine spirit some fortitude and magnanimity might be expected; but presently she begs to be pitied, for

a broken spirit, and more than female tenderness of heart. I have observed that the ladies, who wish to be men, are usually those who have not sufficient strength of mind to be women.

Olivia proceeds in an ironical strain to envy, as "*the happiest of their sex, those who submit to be swathed by custom.*" These persons she stigmatizes with the epithet of *tideless-blooded.* It is the common trick of unprincipled women to affect to despise those who conduct themselves with propriety. Prudence they term *coldness;* fortitude, *insensibility;* and regard to the rights of others, *prejudice.* By this perversion of terms they would laugh or sneer virtue out of countenance; and, by robbing her of all praise, they would deprive her of all immediate motive. Conscious of their own degradation, they would lower every thing, and every

body, to their own standard: they would make you believe, that those who have not yielded to their passions, are destitute of sensibility; that the love, which is not blazoned forth in glaring colours, is not entitled to our sympathy. The sacrifice of the strongest feelings of the human heart to a sense of duty is to be called mean, or absurd; but the shameless phrenzy of passion, exposing itself to public gaze, is to be an object of admiration. These heroines talk of strength of mind; but they forget that strength of mind is to be shown in resisting their passions, not in yielding to them. Without being absolutely of an opinion, which I have heard maintained, that all virtue is sacrifice, I am convinced, that the essential characteristic of virtue is to bear and forbear. These sentimentalists can do neither.

They talk of sacrifices and generosity; but they are the veriest egotists—the most selfish creatures alive.

Open your eyes, my dear Leonora, and see things as they really are. Lady Olivia thinks it a sufficient excuse for abandoning her husband, to say, that she found "*his soul was not in unison with hers.*" She thinks it an adequate apology for a criminal attachment, to tell you that "*the net was thrown over her heart before she felt her danger: that all its struggles were to no purpose, but to exhaust her strength.*"

If she did not feel her danger, she prepared it. The course of reading which her ladyship followed, was the certain preparation for her consequent conduct. She tells us, that she could not endure "*the common-place of morality, but metaphysics promised her some*

relief." In these days a heroine need not be a moralist, but she must be a metaphysician. She must "*wander in the not inelegant labyrinth;*" and if in the midst of it she comes unawares upon the monster Vice, she must not start, though she have no clew to secure her retreat.

From metaphysics Lady Olivia went on to German novels. "*For her largest portions of bliss, for those rapt moments, which consigned vulgar realities to oblivion,* she owns herself indebted to those writers, who promise an ideal world of pleasure, which, like the *mirage* in the desert, bewilders the feverish imagination. I always suspected the imagination of these *women of feeling* to be more susceptible than their hearts. They want excitation for their morbid sensibility, and they care not at what ex-

pense it is procured. If they could make all the pleasures of life into one cordial, they would swallow it at a draught, in a fit of sentimental spleen. The mental intemperance that they indulge in promiscuous novel-reading, destroys all vigour and clearness of judgment, every thing dances in the varying medium of their imagination. Sophistry passes for reasoning; nothing appears profound but what is obscure; nothing sublime but what is beyond the reach of mortal comprehension. To their vitiated taste the simple pathos, which o'ersteps not the modesty of nature, appears cold, tame, and insipid; they must have *scènes* and a *coup de théâtre;* and ranting, and raving, and stabbing, and drowning, and poisoning; for with them there is no love without murder. Love, in their representations, is indeed a distorted,

ridiculous, horrid monster, from whom common sense, taste, decency, and nature recoil.

But I will be calm.—You say, my dear Leonora, that your judgment has not been blinded by Lady Olivia's fascinating manners; but that you are strongly influenced in her favour by that candour, with which she has revealed to you all her faults. The value of candour in individuals should be measured by their sensibility to shame. When a woman throws off all restraint, and then desires me to admire her candour, I am astonished only at her assurance. Do not be the dupe of such candour. Lady Olivia avows a criminal passion, yet you say that you have no doubts of her innocence. The persuasion of your unsuspecting heart is no argument: when you give me any proofs in her favour, I shall

pay them all due attention. In the mean time I have given you my opinion of those ladies, who place themselves in the most perilous situations, and then expect you to believe them safe.

Olivia's professions of regard for you are indeed enthusiastic. She tells you, that "*your power is unlimited over her heart and understanding; that your friendship would be to her one of the greatest of earthly blessings.*" May be so —but I cannot wish you to be her friend. With whatever confidence she makes the assertion, do not believe that she has a heart capable of feeling the value of yours. These sentimental, unprincipled women make the worst friends in the world. We are often told that, "poor creatures! they do nobody any harm but themselves; but in society

it is scarcely possible for a woman to do harm to herself without doing harm to others; all her connexions must be involved in the consequences of her imprudence. Besides, what confidence can you repose in them? If you should happen to be an obstacle in the way of any of their fancies, do you think that they will respect you or your interests, when they have not scrupled to sacrifice their own to the gratification of their passions? Do you think, that the gossamer of sentiment will restrain those whom the strong chains of prudence could not hold?

O! my dearest child, forcibly as these arguments carry conviction to my mind, I dread lest your compassionate generous temper should prevent their reaching your understanding. Then let me conjure you, by all the respect which

you have ever shown for your mother's opinions, by all that you hold dear or sacred, beware of forming an intimacy with an unprincipled woman. Believe me to be

Your truly affectionate mother,

LETTER VII.

Leonora to her Mother.

May 27th.

NO daughter ever felt more respect for the opinions of a parent than I do for yours, my dearest mother; but you have never, even from childhood, required from me a blind submission, you have always encouraged me to desire conviction. And now, when the happiness of another is at stake, you will forgive me if I am less disposed to yield than I should be, I hope, if my own interest or taste were alone concerned.

You ask me what proofs I have of Lady Olivia's innocence. Believe me, I have such as are convincing to my unbiassed judgment, and such as would be

sufficient to satisfy all your doubts, were I at liberty to lay the whole truth before you. But even to exculpate herself, Olivia will not ruin in your opinion her husband, of whom you imagine that she has no reason to complain. I, who know how anxious she is to obtain your esteem, can appreciate the sacrifice that she makes; and in this instance, as in many others, I admire her magnanimity: it is equal to her candour, for which she is entitled to praise even by your own principles, dear mother; since, far from having *thrown off all restraint*, she is exquisitely susceptible of shame.

As to her understanding—have no persons of great talents ever been unfortunate? Frequently we see, that they have not been able, by all their efforts and all their powers, to remedy the defects in

the characters and tempers of those with whom they have unhappily been connected. Olivia married very young, and was unfortunately mistaken in her choice of a husband: on that subject I can only deplore her errour, and its consequences: but as to her disagreements with her own family, I do not think her to blame. For the mistakes we make in the choice of lovers or friends we may be answerable, but we cannot be responsible for the faults of the relations who are given to us by nature. If we do not please them it may be our misfortune; it is not necessarily our fault. I cannot be more explicit, without betraying Lady Olivia's confidence, and implicating others in defending her.

With respect to that attachment of which you speak with so much just

severity, she has given me the strongest assurances, that she will do every thing in her power to conquer it. Absence, you know, is the first and the most difficult step, and this she has taken. Her course of reading displeases you: I cannot defend it: but I am persuaded that it is not a proof of her taste being vitiated. Many people read ordinary novels as others take snuff, merely from habit, from the want of petty excitation; and not, as you suppose, from the want of exorbitant or improper stimulus. Those who are unhappy have recourse to any trifling amusement, that can change the course of their thoughts. I do not justify Olivia for having chosen such *comforters* as certain novels, but I pity her, and impute this choice to want of fortitude, not to depravity of taste. Before she married, a strict injunction was laid upon

her, not to read any book that was called a novel: this raised in her mind a sort of perverse curiosity. By making any books or opinions contraband, the desire to read and circulate them is increased; bad principles are consequently smuggled into families, and being kept secret, can never be subject to fair examination. I think it must be advantageous to the right side of any question, that all which can be said against it should be openly heard, that it may be answered. I do not

"Hate when Vice can bolt her arguments,"

for I know that Virtue has a tongue to answer her. The more she repeats her assertions the better; because, when familiarized, their boldness will not astound the understanding, and the charm of novelty will not be

mistaken for the power of truth. We may observe, that the admiration for the class of writers to whom you allude, though violent in its commencement, has abated since they have been more known; and numbers, who began with rapture, have ended with disgust. Persons of vivacious imaginations, like Olivia, may be caught at first view by whatever has the appearance of grandeur or sublimity; but if time be allowed for examination, they will infallibly detect the disproportions, and these will ever afterwards shock their taste: if you will not allow leisure for comparison; if you say, do not look at such strange objects, the obedient eyes may turn aside, but the rebel imagination pictures something a thousand times more wonderful and charming than the reality. I will venture to predict, that Olivia will soon

be tired of the species of novels which she now admires, and that, once surfeited with these books, and convinced of their pernicious effects, she will never relapse into the practice of novel reading.

As to her taste for metaphysical books

"Dear mother, I am very daring to differ with you in so many points but permit me to say, that I do not agree with you in detesting metaphysics. People may lose themselves in that labyrinth, but why should they meet with vice in the midst of it? The characters of a moralist, a practical moralist, and a metaphysician, are not incompatible, as we may see in many amiable and illustrious examples. To examine human motives, and the nature of the human mind, is not to destroy the power of virtue, or to increase the influence of vice. The chemist, after analysing certain sub-

stances, and after discovering their constituent parts, can lay aside all that is heterogeneous, and recompound the substance in a purer state. From analogy we might infer, that the motives of metaphysicians ought to be purer than those of the vulgar and ignorant. To discover the art of converting base into noble passions, or to obtain a universal remedy for all mental diseases, is perhaps beyond the power of metaphysicians; but in the pursuit, useful discoveries may be made.

As to Olivia's letters—I am sorry I sent them to you; for I see that they have lowered, instead of raising her in your opinion. But if you criticise letters, written in openness and confidence of heart to a private friend, as if they were set before the tribunal of the public, you are . . . may I say it? not only

severe, but unjust; for you try and condemn the subjects of one country by the laws of another.

Dearest mother, be half as indulgent to Olivia as you are to me; indeed you are prejudiced against her; and because you see some faults, you think her whole character vicious. But would you cut down a fine tree because a leaf is withered, or because the canker-worm has eaten into the bud? Even if a main branch were decayed, are there not remedies which, skilfully applied, can save the tree from destruction, and perhaps restore it to its pristine beauty?

And now, having exhausted all my allusions, all my arguments, and all my little stock of eloquence, I must come to a plain matter of fact——

Before I received your letter I had invited Lady Olivia to spend some time at

L—— Castle. I fear that you will blame my precipitation, and I reproach myself for it, because I know it will give you pain. However, though you will think me imprudent, I am certain you would rather that I were imprudent than unjust. I have defended Olivia from what I believe to be unmerited censure; I have invited her to my house; she has accepted my proffered kindness; to withdraw it afterwards would be doing her irreparable injury: it would confirm all that the world can suspect: it would be saying to the censorious—I am convinced that you are right, and I deliver your victim up to you.

Thus I should betray the person whom I undertook to defend: her confidence in me, her having but for a moment accepted my protection, would be

her ruin. I could not act in so base a manner.

Fear nothing for me, my best, but too anxious friend. I may do Lady Olivia some good; she can do me no harm. She may learn the principles which you have taught me; I can never catch from her any tastes or habits which you would disapprove. As to the rest, I hazard little or nothing. The hereditary credit which I enjoy in my maternal right enables me to assist others without injuring myself.

Your affectionate daughter,

LEONORA.

LETTER VIII.

The Duchess of—— to her Daughter.

MY DEAREST CHILD, June 2d.

I HOPE that you are in the right, and that I am in the wrong.

Your affectionate mother,

LETTER IX.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

June 8th.

PREPARE yourself, my ever dear and charming Gabrielle, for all the torments of jealousy. Know, that since I came to England I have formed a new friendship with a woman who is interesting in the extreme, who has charmed me by the simplicity of her manners and the generous sensibility of her heart. Her character is certainly too reserved: yet even this defect has perhaps increased her power over my imagination, and consequently over my affections. I know not by what magic she has obtained it, but she has already an ascendancy over me, which would quite astonish *you*, who know my wayward fancies and independent spirit.

Perhaps this magic is only, as Leonora de Galigai once said, "*the power which strong minds have over weak ones.*"

Alas! I confess my heart is weak indeed; and I fear that all the power of friendship and philosophy combined will never strengthen it sufficiently. Oh, Gabrielle! how can I hope to obliterate from my soul that attachment, which has marked the colour of my destiny for years?! Yet such courage, such cruel courage is required of me, and of such I have boasted myself capable. Lady Leonora L——, my new friend, has, by all the English eloquence of virtue, obtained from me a promise, which, I fear, I shall not have the fortitude to keep—but I must make the attempt—— Forbid R*** to write to me——Yes! I have written the words——Forbid R*** to write to me——Forbid him to think of me——

I will do more—if possible I will forbid myself henceforward to think of him—to think of love——Adieu, my Gabrielle ——All the illusions of life are over, and a dreary blank of future existence lies before me, terminated only by the grave. To morrow I go to L—— Castle, with feelings, which I can compare only to those of the unfortunate la Vallière when she renounced her lover, and resolved to bury herself in a cloister.—Alas! why have not I the resource of devotion?

Your unhappy

OLIVIA.

LETTER X.

General B—— to Mr. L——

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PUBLISH my travels!—Not I, my dear friend. The world shall never have the pleasure of laughing at General B——'s trip to Paris. Before a man sets about to inform others, he should have seen, not only the surface, but the bottom of things; he should have had, not only a *vue d'oiseau,* but (to use a celebrated naval commander's expression,) a *vue de poisson* of his subject. By this time you must have heard enough of the Louvre and the Tuilleries, and Versailles, and le petit Trianon, and St. Cloud—and you have had enough of pictures and statues; and you know all that can be known of Bonaparté, by seeing him at

a review or a levee; and the fashionable beauties and *celebrated characters* of the hour have all passed and repassed through the magic lantern. A fresh showman might make his figures a little more correct, or a little more in laughable caricature, but he could produce nothing new. Alas! there is nothing new under the sun. Nothing remains for the moderns, but to practise the oldest follies the newest ways. Would you, for the sake of your female friends, know the fashionable dress of a Parisian *elegante*, see Seneca on the transparent vestments of the Roman ladies, who, like these modern belles, were generous in the display of their charms to the public. No doubt these French republicanists act upon the true Spartan principle of modesty: they take the most efficacious method to prevent their influence from being too great

over the imaginations of men, by renouncing all that insidious reserve, which alone can render even beauty permanently dangerous.

Of the cruelties of the revolution I can tell you nothing new. The public have been steeped up to the lips in blood, and have surely had their fill of horrours.

But, my dear friend, you say that I must be able to give a just view of the present state of French society, and of the best parts of it, because I have not, like some of my countrymen, hurried about Paris from one *spectacle* to another, seen the opera, and the play-houses, and the masked balls, and the gaming-houses, and the women of the Palais Royale, and the lions of all sorts; gone through the usual routine of presentation and public dinners, drunk French wine, damned French

cookery, and "come home content." I have certainly endeavoured to employ my time better, and have had the good fortune to be admitted into the best *private societies* in Paris. These were composed of the remains of the French nobility, of men of letters and science, and of families, who, without interfering in politics, devote themselves to domestic duties, to literary and social pleasures. The happy hours I have passed in this society can never be forgotten, and the kindness I have received has made its full impression upon an honest English heart. I will never disgrace the confidence of my friends, by drawing their characters for the public.

Cæsar, in all his glory, and all his despotism, could not, with impunity, force a Roman knight * to go upon the

* Laberius.

stage: but modern anecdote-mongers, more cruel and insolent than Cæsar, force their friends of all ages and sexes, to appear, and speak, and act for the amusement or derision of the Public.

My dear friend, is not my resolution, never to favour the world with my tour, well grounded? I hope that I have proved to your satisfaction, that I could tell people nothing but what I do not understand, or what is not worth telling them, or what has been told them a hundred times, or what, as a gentleman, I am bound not to publish.

Yours truly,

J. B.

LETTER XI.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

L—— Castle, June 26th, ——.

FRIENDSHIP, my amiable and interesting Gabrielle, is more an affair of the heart than of the head, more the instinct of taste than the choice of reason. With me the heart is no longer touched, when the imagination ceases to be charmed. Explain to me this metaphysical phenomenon of my nature, and, for your reward, I will quiet your jealousy, by confessing without compunction what now weighs on my conscience terribly. I begin to feel, that I can never love this English friend as I ought. She is *too English*—far too English for one who has known the charms of French ease, vivacity, and sentiment; for one who

has seen the bewitching Gabrielle's infinite variety.

Leonora has just the figure and face that you would picture to yourself for *une belle Angloise;* and if our Milton comes into your memory, you might repeat—for the quotation is not too trite for a foreigner—

> "Grace is in all her steps, heaven in her eye,
> In every gesture dignity and love."

But then it is grace which says nothing, a heaven only for a husband, the dignity more of a matron than of a heroine, and love that might have suited Eve before she had seen this world. Leonora is certainly a beauty; but then a beauty, who does not know her power, and who, consequently, can make no one else feel its full extent. She is not unlike your beautiful Polish princess, but she has none of the charming Anastasia's irre-

sistible transitions from soft, silent languor, to brilliant, eloquent enthusiasm. All the gestures and attitudes of Anastasia are those of taste and sentiment, Leonora's are simply those of nature. *La belle nature*, but not *le beau idéal*. With a figure that would grace any court, or shine upon any stage, she usually enters a room without producing, or thinking of producing, any sensation; she moves often without seeming to have any other intention than to change her place; and her fine eyes generally look as if they were made only to see with. At times she certainly has a most expressive and intelligent countenance. I have seen her face enlightened by the fire of genius, and shaded by the exquisite touches of sensibility; but all this is merely called forth by the occasion, and vanishes before it is noticed by

half the company. Indeed, the full radiance of her beauty or of her wit seldom shines upon any one but her husband. The audience and spectators are forgotten. Heavens! what a difference between the effect which Leonora and Gabrielle produce! But to do her justice, much of this arises from the different *organization* of French and English society. In Paris, the insipid details of domestic life are judiciously kept behind the scenes, and women appear as heroines upon the stage, with all the advantages of decoration, to listen to the language of love, and to receive the homage of public admiration. In England, gallantry is not yet *systematized*, and our sex look more to their families than to what is called *society* for the happiness of existence. And yet the affection of mothers for

their children does not appear to be so strong in the hearts of English as of French women. In England ladies do not talk of the *sentiment of maternity* with that elegance and sensibility with which you expatiate upon it continually in conversation. They literally are *des bonnes mères de famille*, not from the impulse of sentiment, but merely from an early instilled sense of duty, for which they deserve little credit. However, they devote their lives to their children, and those who have the misfortune to be their intimate friends are doomed to see them half the day, or all day long, go through the part of the good mother in all its diurnal monotony of lessons and caresses. All this may be vastly right—it is a pity it is so tiresome. For my part I cannot conceive how persons of superior taste and talents can submit

to it, unless it be to make themselves a reputation, and that you know is done by writing and talking on the general principles, not by submitting to the minute details of education. The great painter sketches the outline, and touches the principal features, but leaves the subordinate drudgery of filling up the parts, finishing the drapery, &c., to inferior hands.

Upon recollection, in my favourite "Sorrows of Werter," the heroine is represented cutting bread and butter for a groupe of children; I admire this simplicity in Goethe, 'tis one of the secrets by which he touches the heart. Simplicity is delightful by way of variety, but always simplicity is worse than *toujours perdrix*. Children in a novel or a drama are charming little creatures: but in real life they are often insufferable

plagues. What becomes of them in Paris I know not; but I am sure that they are never in the way of one's conversations, or reveries; and it would be a blessing to society if English children were as inaudible and invisible. These things strike me sensibly upon my return to England, after so long an absence. Surely by means of the machinery of masters, and governesses, and schools, the manufacture of education might be carried on without incommoding those who desire to see only the finished production. Here I find the daughter of an English duke, but lately married, a woman in the first bloom of youth, of the highest pretensions in point of rank, beauty, fashion, accomplishments, and talents, devoting herself to the education of two children, orphans, left to her care by an elder sister. To take charge

of orphans is a good and fine action; as such it touches me sensibly; but then where is the necessity of sacrificing one's friends, and one's pleasures, day after day, and hour after hour, to mere children? Leonora can persevere only from a notion of duty. Now in my opinion, when generosity becomes duty it ceases to be virtue. Virtue requires free will; duty implies constraint. Virtue acts from the impulse of the moment, and never tires or is tired; duty drudges on in consequence of reflection, and, weary herself, wearies all beholders. Duty, always laborious, never can be graceful; and what is not graceful in woman cannot be amiable. Can it, my amiable Gabrielle?—But I reproach myself for all I have written. Leonora is my friend—besides, I am really obliged to her, and for the universe would I not hint a

thought to her disadvantage. Indeed she is a most excellent, a faultless character, and it is the misfortune of your Olivia not to love perfection as she ought.

My charming and interesting Gabrielle, I am more out of humour with myself than you can conceive; for in spite of all that reason and gratitude urge, I fear I cannot prefer the insipid virtues of Leonora to the lively graces of Gabrielle.

As to the cold husband, Mr. L——, I neither know nor wish to know any thing of him; but I live in hopes of an agreeable and interesting accession to our society to day from the arrival of Leonora's intimate friend, a young widow, whose husband I understand was a man of a harsh temper: she has gone through severe trials with surprising

fortitude; and though I do not know her history, I am persuaded it must be interesting. Assuredly this husband could never have been the man of her choice, and of course she must have had some secret unhappy attachment, which doubtless preyed upon her spirits. Probably the object of her affection, in despair at her marriage, plighted his faith unfortunately, or possibly may have fallen a sacrifice to his constancy. I am all impatience to see her. Her husband's name was so ruggedly English, that I am sure you would never be able to pronounce it, especially if you only saw it written, therefore I shall always to you call her Helen, a name which is more pleasing to the ear, and more promising to the imagination. I have not been able to prevail upon Leonora to describe her friend to me exactly; she

says only, that she loves Helen too well to overpraise her beforehand. My busy fancy has however bodied forth her form, and painted her in the most amiable and enchanting colours. Hark! —she is just arrived. Adieu.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XII.

From Mrs. C—— to Miss B——.

July 2.

MY dear Margaret, why is not your name Matilda, or Seraphina, or Adelina? How can any body of the name of Margaret be amiable or estimable, or a fit correspondent for a person of delicate sensibility? Stay; I am wrong, and you are fit to be written to, provided you style yourself Marguerite; for then you know you are a pearl, and a daisy, as well as a woman, and I may go back to Chaucer and the fourteenth century; or, farther still, to the Troubadours and the Provencals, and I may say the finest things imaginable about the *eye of day*, and the wor-

ship of the daisy, and the burthen of my song may be

"Si douce est la Marguerite."

Having now had the honour of spending nearly a week in the society of the celebrated enchantress, Lady Olivia, you will naturally expect that I should be much improved in the art of love: but before I come to my improvements, I must tell you, what will be rather more interesting, that Leonora is perfectly well and happy, and that I have the dear delight of exclaiming ten times an hour, "Ay, just as I thought it would be!—Just such a wife, just such a mother, just such a mistress of a family I knew she would make."

"*Not to admire*" is an art or a precept which I have not been able to practise much since I came here. Some philosophers tell us that admiration is not

only a silly but a fatiguing state of mind; and I suppose that nothing could have preserved my mind from being tired to death, but the quantity of bodily exercise which I have taken. I could if I pleased give you a plan and elevation of this castle. Nay, I doubt not but I could stand an examination in the catalogue of the pictures, or the inventory of the furniture.

You, Helen!—you who could not remember the colour of Lady N——'s *new* curtains after you had seen them at least a hundred times!

Lady N—— was indifferent to me, and how could I hang up her curtains in my memory? By what could they hold? Do not you know Margaret . . . . all the fine things that I could say, and that quartoes have said before me, about the

association of ideas and sensations, &c.? Those we love impart to uninteresting objects the power of pleasing, as the magnet can communicate to inert metal its attractive influence.

Till Mr. L * * * was Leonora's lover I never liked him much. I do not mean to call him inert. I always knew that he had many excellent qualities, but there was nothing in his temper peculiarly agreeable to me, and there was something in his character that I did not thoroughly understand; yet since he is become Leonora's husband I find my understanding much improved, and I dare say it will soon be so far enlarged, that I shall comprehend him perfectly.

Leonora has almost persuaded me to like Lady Olivia. Not to laugh at her

would be impossible. I wish you could see the way in which we go on together. Our first setting out would have diverted you. Enter Lady Olivia breathless, with an air of theatric expectation—advances to embrace Helen, who is laughing with Leonora—her back turned towards the side of the stage at which Olivia enters—Olivia pauses suddenly, and measures Helen *with a long look.* What passed in Lady Olivia's mind at this moment I do not know, but I guess that she was disappointed wofully by my appearance. After some time she was recovered, by Leonora's assistance, from her reverie, and presently began to admire my vivacity, and to find out that I was Clarissa's Miss Howe—no, I was Lady G.—no, I was Heloisa's Clara: but I, choosing to be myself, and in;

sisting upon being an *original,* sunk again visibly and rapidly in Olivia's opinion, till I was in imminent danger of being *nobody.* Leonora again kindly interposed to save me from annihilation; and after an interval of an hour or two dedicated to letter-writing, Lady Olivia returned and seated herself beside me, resolved to decide what manner of woman I was. Certain novels are the touchstones of feeling and *intellect* with certain ladies. Unluckily I was not well read in these; and in the questions put to me from these sentimental statute books, I gave strange judgments, often for the husband or parents against the heroine. I did not even admit the plea of destiny, irresistible passion or *entraînement,* as in all cases sufficient excuse for all errours and crimes. Moreover, I ex-

cited astonishment by calling things by obsolete names. I called a married woman's having a lover *a crime!* Then I was no judge of virtues, for I thought a wife's making an intimate friend of her husband's mistress was scandalous and mean; but this I was told is the height of delicacy and generosity. I could not perceive the propriety of a man's liking two women at the same time, or a woman's having a platonic attachment for half a dozen lovers; and I owned that I did not wish divorce could be as easily obtained in England as in France. All which proved that I have never been out of England—a great misfortune! I dare say it will soon be discovered that women as well as madeira cannot be good for any thing till they have crossed the line. But beside the obloquy of having

lived only in the best company in England, I was further disgraced by the discovery, that I am deplorably ignorant of metaphysics, and have never been enlightened by any philanthropic transcendental foreign professor of humanity. Profoundly humiliated, and not having yet taken the first step towards knowledge, the knowing that I was ignorant, I was pondering upon my sad fate, when Lady Olivia, putting her hand upon my shoulder, summoned me into the court of Love, there in my own proper person to answer such questions as it should please her ladyship to ask. For instance:—

"Were you ever in love?—How often?—When?—Where?—And with whom?"

Never having stood a cross examination in public upon these points, I was

not quite prepared to reply; and I was accused of giving evasive answers, and convicted of blushing. Mr. L——, who was present at this examination, enjoyed, in his grave way, my astonishment and confusion, but said not one word. I rallied my spirits and my wits, and gave some answers which gained the smile of the court on my side.

From these specimens you may guess, my dear Margaret, how well this lady and I are likely to agree. I shall divert myself with her absurdities without scruple. Yet notwithstanding the flagrancy of these, Leonora persuades me to think well of Olivia; indeed I am so happy here, that it would be a difficult matter at present to make me think ill of any body. The good qualities which Leonora sees in her are not yet visible to my

eyes; but Leonora's visual orb is so cleared with charity and love, that she can discern what is not revealed to vulgar sight. Even in the very germe she discovers the minute form of the perfect flower. *The Olivia* will, I hope, in time blow out in full perfection.

Yours affectionately,

HELEN C——.

LETTER XIII.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

July 4th.

OH my Gabrielle! this Helen is not precisely the person that I expected. Instead of being a dejected beauty, she is all life and gayety,

"With spirits light, to every joy in tune."

I own I should like her better if she were a little more pensive; a tinge of melancholy would, in her situation, be so becoming and natural. My imagination was quite disappointed when I beheld the quickness of her eyes and frequency of her smiles. Even her mode of showing affection to Leonora was not such as could please me. This is the first visit, I understand, that she has paid Leonora since her marriage: these friends

have been separated for many months.—I was not present at their meeting: but I came into the room a few minutes after *Helen's* arrival, and I should have thought that they had seen one another but yesterday. This *dear Helen* was quite at ease and at home in a few moments, and seemed as if she had been living with us for years. I make allowance for the ease of well-bred people. Helen has lived much in the world, and has polished manners. But the heart! the heart! is superior to politeness; and even ease, in some situations, shows a want of the delicate *tact* of sentiment. In a similar situation I should have been silent, entranced, absorbed, in my sensations—overcome by them perhaps—dissolved in tears. But in Helen there appeared no symptom of real sensibility—nothing characteristic—nothing profound—nothing concentrated:

it was all superficial, and evaporated in the common way. I was provoked to see Leonora satisfied. She assures me that Helen has uncommonly strong affections, and that her character rather exceeds than is deficient in enthusiasm. Possibly; but I am certain that Helen is in no danger of becoming romantic. Far from being abstracted, I never saw any one seem more interested and eager about every present occurrence—pleased, even to childishness, with every passing trifle. I confess that she is too much of this world for me. But I will if possible suspend my judgment, and study her a few hours longer before I give you my definitive opinion.

July 9th.

Well, my Gabrielle, my *definitive opinion* is, that I can never love this friend

of Leonora. I said that she had lived much in the world—but only in the English world: she has never seen any other; therefore, though quite in a different style from Leonora, she shocks me with the same nationality. All her ideas are exclusively English: she has what is called English good sense, and English humour, and English prejudices of *all sorts*, both masculine and feminine. She takes fire in defence of her country and of her sex; nay, sometimes blushes even to awkwardness, which one would not expect in the midst of her good breeding and vivacity. What a difference between her vivacity and that of my charming Gabrielle! as great as between the enlargement of your mind and the limited nature of her understanding. I tried her on various subjects, but found her entrenched in her own contracted

notions. All new, or liberal, or sublime ideas in morality or metaphysics she either cannot seize, or seizes only to place in a ridiculous point of view.—A certain sign of mediocrity. Adieu, my Gabrielle. I must send you the pictures, whether engaging or forbidding, of those with whom your Olivia is destined to pass her time. When I have no events to relate, still I must write to convey to you my sentiments. Alas! how imperfectly!—for I have interdicted myself the expression of those most interesting to my heart. Leonora, calmly prudent, coolly virtuous, knows not what it costs me to be faithful to this cruel promise. Write to me, my sympathizing, my tender friend!

Your ever unhappy

OLIVIA

LETTER XIV.

Mrs. C—— to Miss B——

July 10th.

SOME very good people, like some very fine pictures, are best at a distance. But Leonora is not one of these: the nearer you approach the better you like her. As in Arabesque-work you may admire the beauty of the design even at a distance, but you cannot appreciate the delicacy of the execution till you examine it closely, and discover that every line is formed of grains of gold almost imperceptibly fine. I am glad that the "small sweet courtesies of life" have been hailed by one sentimental writer at least. The minor virtues are not to be despised even in comparison with the most exalted. The common

rose, I have often thought, need not be ashamed of itself even in company with the finest exotics in a hot house; and I remember that your brother, in one of his letters, observed, that the common cock makes a very respectable figure even in the grand Parisian assembly of all the stuffed birds and beasts in the universe. It is a glorious thing to have a friend who will jump into a river, or down a precipice, to save one's life: but as I do not intend to tumble down precipices, or to throw myself into the water above half a dozen times, I would rather have for my friends persons who would not reserve their kindness wholly for these grand occasions, but who could condescend to make me happy every day, and all day long, even by actions not sufficiently sublime to be recorded in history or romance.

Do not infer from this that I think Leonora would hesitate to make *great* sacrifices. I have had sufficient experience of her fortitude and active courage of mind in the most trying circumstances, whilst many who talked more stoutly shrunk from *committing* themselves by actions.

Some maxim-maker says that past misfortunes are good for nothing but to be forgotten. I am not of his opinion: I think that they are good to make us know our winter from our summer friends, and to make us feel for those who have sustained us in adversity, that most pleasurable sensation of the human mind, gratitude.

But I am straying unawares into the province of sentiment, where I am such a stranger that I shall inevitably lose my way, especially as I am too proud to take

a guide. Lady Olivia **** may perhaps be very fond of Leonora; and as she has every possible cause to be so, it is but reasonable and charitable to suppose that she is: but I should never guess it by her manner. She speaks of her friendship sometimes in the most romantic style, but often makes observations upon *the enviable coolness and imperturbability of Leonora's disposition,* which convinces me that she does not understand it in the least. Those who do not really feel, always pitch their expressions too high, or too low, as deaf people bellow, or speak in a whisper. But I may be mistaken in my suspicions of Olivia, for *to do the lady justice,* as Mrs. Candour would say, she is so affected that it is difficult to know what she really feels. Those who put on rouge occasionally are suspected of wearing it constantly, and never

have any credit for their natural colour; presently they become so accustomed to common rouge, that mistaking scarlet for pale pink, they persist in laying on more and more, till they are like nothing human.

Yours affectionately,

HELEN C——.

LETTER XV.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

July 12th.

I HAVE found it! I have found it! dear Gabrielle rejoice with me! I have solved the metaphysical problem, which perplexed me so cruelly, and now I am once more at peace with myself. I have discovered the reason why I cannot love Leonora, as she merits to be loved: she has obliged me; and the nature of obligation is such, that it supposes superiority on one side, and consequently destroys the equality, the freedom, the ease, the charm of friendship.—Gratitude weighs upon one's heart in proportion to the delicacy of its feelings. To minds of an ordinary sort it may be pleasurable; for with them it is sufficiently feeble to be

calm; but in souls of a superior cast, it is a poignant, painful sensation, because it is too strong ever to be tranquil. In short,

"'Tis bliss but to a certain bound—
Beyond, 'tis agony."

For my own part, the very dread that I shall not be thought to express enough, deprives me of the power to speak or even to feel. Fear, you know, extinguishes affection; and of all fears the dread of not being sufficiently grateful operates the most powerfully. Thus sensibility destroys itself.—Gracious Heaven! teach me to moderate mine.

In the nature of the obligation with which Leonora has oppressed my heart, there is something peculiarly humiliating. Upon my return to this country I found the malignant genius of Scandal bent upon destroying my reputation. *Reputation*! I cannot convey to you, Ga-

brielle, the importance which women in England attach to that word, nor the emphasis with which it is pronounced. You have no idea of the miserable force of prejudice which still prevails here. There are some women who emancipate themselves, but then unluckily they are not in sufficient number to keep each other in countenance in public. *One* would not choose to be confined to the society of people who cannot go to Court, though sometimes they take the lead elsewhere. We are full half a century behind you in civilization; and your revolution has, I find, afforded all our stiffened moralists *incontrovertible* arguments against liberty of opinion or conduct in either sex.

I was thunderstruck when I saw the grave and repulsive faces of all my fe-

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male acquaintance. At first I attributed every thing that was strange and disagreeable to English reserve, of which I had retained a sufficiently formidable idea: but I presently found that there was some other cause which kept all these nice consciences at a distance from my atmosphere.

Would you believe it, I saw myself upon the point of being quite excluded from good society. Leonora saved me from this imminent danger. Voluntarily, and I must say nobly, if not gracefully, Leonora came forward in my defence. Vanquishing her natural English timidity, she braved the eyes, and tongues, and advice of all the prudes and old dowagers my enemies, amongst whom I may count the superannuated Duchess her mother, the proudest dowa-

ger now living. When I appeared in public with a personage of Leonora's unblemished reputation, scandal, much against her will, was forced to be silent, and it was to be taken for granted that I was, in the language of prudery, perfectly innocent. Leonora, to be consistent in goodness, or to complete her triumph in the face of the world, invited me to accompany her to the country.——I have now been some weeks at this superb castle. Heaven is my witness that I came with a heart overflowing with affection; but the painful, the agonizing sense of humiliation mixed with my tenderest sentiments, and all became bitterness insufferable. O Gabrielle! you, and perhaps you alone upon earth, can understand my feelings. Adieu!—pity me—I must not ask you a single

question about—I must not write the name for ever dear—What am I saying? where are my promises?—Adieu—Adieu.

Your unhappy

OLIVIA.

LETTER XVI.

Mrs. C—— to Miss B——.

July 16th.

AS I have never thought it my duty in this mortal life to mourn for the absurdities of my fellow creatures, I should now enjoy the pleasure of laughing at Lady Olivia, if my propensity were not checked by a serious apprehension that she will injure Leonora's happiness. From the most generous motives dear Leonora is continually anxious to soothe her mind, to persuade and reason her into common sense, to reestablish her in public opinion, and to make her happy. But I am convinced that Lady Olivia never will have common sense, and consequently never can be happy. Twenty times a day I wish

her at the antipodes, for I dread lest Leonora should be implicated in her affairs, and involved in her misery.

Last night this foolish woman, who unluckily is graced with all the power of words, poured forth a fine declamation in favour of divorce. In vain Leonora reasoned, expostulated, blushed. Lady Olivia cannot blush for herself; and though both Mr. L*** and I were present, she persisted with that vehemence which betrays personal interest in an argument. I suspect that she is going to try to obtain a divorce from her husband, that she may marry her lover. Consider the consequences of this for Leonora.—Leonora to be the friend of a woman who will brave the infamy of a trial at Doctors Commons! But Leonora says I am mistaken, and that all this is only Olivia's way of talking. I

wish then, that if she does not intend to act like a fool, she would not talk like one. I agree with the gentleman who said that a woman, who begins by playing the fool, always ends by playing the devil. Even before me, though I certainly never solicit her confidence, Lady Olivia talks with the most imprudent openness of her love affairs; not I think from ingenuousness, but from inability to restrain herself. Begin what subject of conversation I will, as far from Cupid as possible, she will bring me back again to him before I know where I am. She has no ideas but on this one subject. Leonora, dear kind-hearted Leonora, attributes this to the temporary influence of a violent passion, which she assures me Olivia will conquer, and that then all her great and good qualities will, as if freed from

enchantment, reassume their natural vigour. *Natural!*—there is nothing natural about this sophisticated lady. I wish Leonora would think more of herself and less of other people. As to Lady Olivia's excessive sensibility, I have no faith in it. I do not think either the lover or the passion so much to be feared for her, as the want of a lover and the habit of thinking that it is necessary to be in love. **********

Yours affectionately,

HELEN C——.

LETTER XVIII.

General B—— to Mr. L——.

Paris, June 18th, Hôtel de Courlande.

MY DEAR L——,

WHEN you ask a countryman in England the way to the next town, he replies, "Where do you come from, master?" and till you have answered this question, no information can you obtain from him. You ask me what I know of Lady Olivia ——. What is your reason for asking? Till you have answered this question, hope for no information from me. Seriously, Lady Olivia had left Paris before I arrived, therefore you cannot have my judgment of her Ladyship, which I presume is all you could depend upon. If you will take hearsay evidence, and if

you wish me to speak to general character, I can readily satisfy you. Common repute is loud and unanimous in favour of her talents, beauty, and fashion: there is no resisting, I am told, the fascination of her manners and conversation; *but* her opinions are fashionably liberal, and her practice as liberal as her theories. Since her separation from her husband, her lover is publicly named. Some English friends plead in her favour platonic attachment: this, like benefit of clergy, is claimed of course for a first offence: but Lady Olivia's Parisian acquaintance are not so scrupulous or so old fashioned as to think it an offence; they call it an *arrangement,* and to this there can be no objection. As a French gentleman said to me the other day, with an unanswerable shrug, " Tout le monde sait que R*** est son amant; d'ailleurs,

c'est la femme la plus aimable du monde."

As to Lady Olivia's friend, Madame de P——, she sees a great deal of company: her house is the resort of people of various descriptions; ministers, foreigners, coquettes, and generals; in short, of all those who wish without scandal or suspicion to intrigue either in love or politics. Her assemblies are also frequented by a few of *l'ancien régime*, who wish to be in favor with the present government. Madame de P——, of a noble family herself, and formerly much at court, has managed matters so as to have regained all her husband's confiscated property, and to have acquired much influence with some of the leading men of the day. In her manners and conversation there is an odd mixture of frivolity and address, of the airs of co-

quetry and the jargon of sentiment. She has the politeness of a French countess, with *exquisite* knowledge of the world, and of *les convenances*, joined to that freedom of opinion which marks the present times. In the midst of all these inconsistencies, it is difficult to guess what her real character may be. At first sight, I should pronounce her to be a silly woman, governed by vanity and the whim of the moment: but those who know her better than I do, believe her to be a woman of considerable talents, inordinately fond of power, and uniformly intent upon her own interest, using coquetry only as a means to govern our sex, and frivolity as a mask for her ambition. In short, Madame de P—— is a perfect specimen of the combination of an *intrigante* and an *élégante:* a combination often found in

Paris. Here women mingle politics and gallantry—men mix politics and epicurism—which is the better mixture?

I have business of importance to my country to transact to day, *therefore* I am going to dine with the modern Apicius. Excuse me, my dear friend, if I cannot stay at present to answer your questions about divorce. I must be punctual. What sort of a negociator can he make who is too late at a minister's dinner? Five minutes might change the face of Europe.

Yours truly,

J. B.

LETTER XVIII.

Madame de P—— to Olivia.

Paris.

MY incomparable Olivia! your letters are absolutely divine. I am *maussade*, I *vegetate*. I cannot be said to live the days when I do not hear from you. Last Thursday I was disappointed of one of these dear letters, and *Brave-et-tendre* told me frankly that I was so little amiable he should not have known me.—As to the rest, pardon me for not writing punctually: I have been really in a chaos of business and pleasure, and I do not know which fatigues most. But I am obliged to attend the ministers every day, for the sake of my friends.

A thousand and a thousand thanks for

your pictures of your English friends: sketches by a masterly hand must be valuable, whatever the subject. I would rather have the pictures than the realities. Your Helen and your Lady Leonora are too good for me, and I pity you from my soul for being shut up in that old castle. I suppose it is like an old castle in Dauphiny, where I once spent a week, and where I was nearly frightened to death by the flapping of the old tapestry behind my bed, and by the bats which flew in through the broken windows. They say, however, that our *châteaux* and yours are something different. Of this I have no clear conception.

I send you three comforters in your prison. A billet doux—a new novel—and a pattern of my sandal; a billet-doux from R*** says every thing for itself; but I must say something for the new novel.

Zenobie, which I now send you, is the declared rival of Seraphine. Parties have run high on both sides, and applications were made and inuendoes discovered, and wit and sentiment came to close combat; and, as usual, people talked till they did not understand themselves. For a fortnight, wherever one went the first words to be heard on entering every *salon* were Seraphine and Zenobie.—Peace or war.—Mademoiselle Georges and Mademoiselle Duchesnois were nothing to Seraphine and Zenobie. For Heaven's sake tell me which you prefer! But I fear they will be no more talked of before I have your answer. To say the truth, I am tired of both heroines, for a fortnight is too long to talk or think of any one thing.

I flatter myself you will like my sandals: they are my own invention, and

my foot really shows them to advantage. You know I might say, as du P*** said of himself, "J'ai un pied dont la petitesse échappe à la vitesse de la pensée."—I thought my poor friend Madame Dumarais would have died with envy, the other day, when I appeared in them at her ball; which by the by was in all its decorations as absurd, and in as bad taste as usual. For the most part these *nouveaux riches* lavish money, but can never purchase taste or a sense of propriety. All is gold: but that is not enough; or rather that is too much.—In spite of all that both the Indies, China, Arabia, Egypt, and even Paris can do for them, they will be ever out of place, in the midst of their magnificence: they will never even know how to ruin themselves nobly.—They must live and die, as they were born, ridiculous. Now

I would rather not exist than feel myself ridiculous. But I believe no one living, not even le petit d'Heronville, knows himself to be an object of ridicule. There are no looking-glasses for the mind, and I question whether we should use them if there were. D'Heronville is just as you left him, and as much my amusement as he used to be yours. He goes on with an eternal galimathias of patriotism, with such a self-sufficient air and decided tone! never suspecting that he says only what other people make him say, and that he is listened to, only to find out what *some people* think. Many will say before fools what they would not hazard before wise men; not considering that fools can repeat as well as parrots. I once heard a great man remark, that the only spies fit to be trusted are those who do not know

themselves to be such, who have no salary but what their vanity pays them, and who are employed without being accredited.

But trève de politique!—My charming Olivia, I know, abhors politics as much as I detest metaphysics—from all lips or pens but hers. Now I must tell you something of your friends here.

O—— talks nonsense as agreeably as ever, and dances as divinely. 'Tis a pity he cannot always dance, for then he would not ruin himself at play. He wants me to get him a regiment—As if I had any power!—or as if I would use it for this purpose, when I know that my interesting friend Madame Q—— would break her poor little heart if he were to quit her.

Mon Cœur is as pretty as ever; but she is now in affliction. She has lost her

dear little dog Coriscande. He died suddenly; almost in her arms! She will erect a monument to him in her charming *jardin Anglois.* This will occupy her—and then "Time the comforter"—Inimitable Voltaire!

Our dear *Brillante* has just had a superb *hommage* from her lover the commissary—a necklace and bracelets of the finest pearls: but she cannot wear them yet: her brother having died last week, she is in deep mourning. This brother was not upon good terms with her. He never forgave the divorce. He thought it a disgrace to have a sister *une divorcée*; but he was full of prejudice, poor man, and he is dead, and we need think no more of him or of his faults.

Our ci-devant chanoine, who married that little Meudon, is as miserable as possible, and as ridiculous: for he is jealous

of his young wife, and she is a *franche-coquette.* The poor man looks as if he repented sincerely of his errors. What a penitent a coquette can make of a husband! Bourdaloue and Massillon would have tried their powers on this man's heart in vain.

Did I tell you that Madame G—— is a second time divorced? But this time it is her husband's doing, not hers. This handsome husband has spent all the immense fortune she brought him, and now procures a divorce for *incompatibility of temper*, and is going to marry another lady, richer than Madame G——, and as great a fool. This system of divorce, though convenient, is not always advantageous to women. However, in one point of view, I wonder that the rigid moralists do not defend it, as

the only means of making a man in love with his own wife. A man divorces; the law does not permit him to marry the same woman afterwards; of course this prohibition makes him fall in love with her. Of this we have many edifying examples besides Fanchette, who, though she was so beautiful, and a tolerable actress, would never have drawn all Paris to the Vaudeville if she had not been a *divorcée*, and if it had not been known that her husband, who played the lover of the piece, was dying to marry her again. Apropos, Madame St. Germain is acting one of her own romances, in the high sublime style, and threatens to poison herself for love of her perjured inconstant—but it will not do.

Madame *la Grande* was near having a sad accident the other night: in crossing

the Pont-neuf her horses took fright; for there was a crowd and *embarras*, a man having just drowned himself—not for love, but for hunger. How many men, women, and children, do you think drowned themselves in the Seine last year? Upwards of two hundred. This is really shocking, and a stop should be put to it by authority. It absolutely makes me shudder, and reflect. Mais, *après nous le déluge* was la Pompadour's maxim, and should be ours.

Madame Folard *se coiffe en cheveux*; and Madame Rocroix crowns herself with roses, whilst all the world knows that either of them is old enough to be my mother. In former days a woman could not wear flowers after thirty, and was *bel esprit* or *dévote* at forty, for it was thought bad taste to do otherwise. But now every

body may be as young as they please, or as ridiculous. Women have certainly gained by the new order of things.

Our poor friend *Vermeille* se meurt de la poitrine—a victim to tea and late hours. She is an interesting creature, and my heart bleeds for her: she will never last till winter.

Do you know, it is said we shall soon have no wood to burn. What can have become of all our forests? People should inquire after them. The Venus de Medicis has at last found her way down the Seine. It is not determined yet where to place her: but she is at Paris, and that is a great point gained for her. You complained that the Apollo stands with his back so near the wall, that there is no seeing half the beauties of his shoulders. If I have any influence, Venus

shall not be so served. I have been to see her. She is certainly divine—but not French. I do not despair of seeing her surpassed by our artists.

Adieu, my adorable Olivia. I should have finished my letter yesterday; but when I came home in the morning, expecting to have a moment sacred to you and friendship, who should I find established in an arm-chair in my cabinet, but our old Countess *Ci-devant*. There was no retreat for me. In the midst of my concentrated rage I was obliged to advance and embrace her, and there was an end of happiness for the day. The pitiless woman kept me till it was even too late to dress, talking over her family misfortunes; as if they were any thing to me. She wants to get her son employed, but her pride will not let her

pay her court properly, and she wants me to do it for her. Not I, truly. I should shut my doors against her, but for the sake of her nephew *le roué*, who is really a pretty young man. My angel, I embrace you tenderly.

GABRIELLE DE P——.

LETTER XIX.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

July 25.

HOW melancholy to a feeling heart is the moment when illusion vanishes, whether that illusion has been created by the magic of love or of friendship! How many such moments, Gabrielle, has your unfortunate friend been doomed to endure! Alas! when will treacherous fancy cease to throw a deceitful brilliancy upon each new object!

Perhaps I am too delicate—but R***'s note, enclosed in your last, my Gabrielle, was unlike his former letters. It was not passionate, it was only reasonable. A man who can reason is no longer in love. The manner in which he speaks of divorce shocked me beyond

expression. Is it for him to talk of scruples when upon this subject I have none? I own to you that my pride and my tenderness are sensibly wounded. 'Tis for him to convince me that I am in the wrong. I shall not be at ease till I hear from you again, my amiable friend: for my residence here becomes insupportable. But a few short weeks are past since I fancied Leonora an angel, and now she falls below the ordinary standard of mortals. But a few short weeks are past since, in the full confidence of finding in Leonora a second self, a second Gabrielle, I eagerly developed to her my inmost soul, yet now my heart closes, I fear never more to open. The sad conviction, that we have but few ideas, and no feelings in common, stops my tongue when I attempt to speak, chills my heart when I begin to listen.

Do you know, my Gabrielle, I have discovered that Leonora is inordinately selfish? For all other faults I have charity; but selfishness, which has none to give, must expect none. O divine Sensibility, defend me from this isolation of the heart! All thy nameless sorrows, all thy heart-rending tortures, would I a thousand times rather endure. Leonora's selfishness breaks out perpetually; and, alas! it is of the most inveterate, incurable kind; every thing that is immediately or remotely connected with self, she loves, and loves with the most provoking pertinacity. Her mother, her husband, her child, she adores because they are her own; and even her sister's children, because she considers them, she says, as her own. All and every possible portion of self she cherishes with the most

sordid partiality. All that touches these relations touches her; and every thing which is theirs, or, in other words, which is hers, she deems excellent and sacred. Last night I just hazarded a word of ridicule upon some of the obsolete prejudices of that august personage, that duchess of old tapestry, her still living ancestor. I wish, Gabrielle, you had seen Leonora's countenance. Her colour rose up to her temples, her eyes lightened with indignation, and her whole person assumed a dignity, which might have killed a presumptuous lover, or, better far, might have enslaved him for life. What folly to waste all this upon such an occasion. But selfishness is ever blind to its real interests. Leonora is so bigotted to this old woman, that she is already in mind an old woman herself. She fancies that she traces a resemblance

to her mother, and of course to dear self, in her infant, and she looks upon it with such doating eyes, and talks to it with such exquisite tones of fondness, as are to me, who know the source from which they proceed, quite ridiculous and disgusting. An infant, who has no imaginable merit, and, to impartial eyes, no charms, she can love to this excess from no motive but pure *egoism*. Then her husband—but this subject I must reserve for another letter. I am summoned to walk with him this moment.

Adieu, charming Gabrielle.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XX.

General B—— to Mr. L——.

MY DEAR L——, Paris, 180-.

ENCLOSED I send you, according to your earnest desire, Cambaceres' reflections upon the intended new law of divorce. Give me leave to ask why you are so violently interested upon this occasion? Do you envy France the blessings of divorce? Do you wish that English husbands and wives should have the power of divorcing each other at pleasure for *incompatibility of temper?* And have you calculated the admirable effect this would produce upon the temper both of the weaker and the stronger sex? To bear and forbear would then be no longer necessary. Every happy

pair might quarrel and part at a moment's notice—at a year's notice at most. And their children? The wisdom of Solomon would be necessary, to settle the just division of the children. I have this morning been attending a court of law to hear a famous trial between two husbands; the abdicated lord a ci-devant noble, and the reigning husband a ci-devant grand-vicaire, who has *reformed*. Each party claimed a right to the children by the first marriage, for the children were minors entitled to large fortunes. The *reformed* grand-vicaire pleaded his own cause with astonishing assurance, amidst the discountenancing looks, murmurs, and almost amidst the groans of disapprobation from the majority of the auditors. His powers of impudence, however, failed him at last. I sat on the bench behind him, and saw that his ears had the

grace to blush. After another hearing, this cause, which had lasted four years, was decided; and the first husband and real father was permitted to have the guardianship of his own children. During the four years' litigation, the friends of the parties, from the grandmother downwards, were all at irreconcilable variance. What became of the children all this time! Their mother was represented during the trial as she deserved to be, as a wretch void of shame and gratitude. The father was universally pitied, though his rival painted him as a coward, who during the revolution had left his children to save himself by flight; and as a fool, who had left his wife to the care of a profligate grand-vicaire. Divorce is not countenanced by opinion in Paris, though permitted by law. With a few exceptions in extraordinary cases, I have

observed that *les divorcées* are not received in good society.

To satiate your curiosity, I send you all the papers that have been written lately on divorce, of which you will find that of Cambaceres the best. The wits say that he is an impartial judge. I presume you want these pamphlets for some foolish friend; for yourself you can never want them, blessed as you are with such a wife as Lady Leonora L——. I am not surprised that profligate men should wish for freedom of divorce, because it would save them damages in Doctors Commons: but you rather astonish me —if a wise man should be astonished at any thing in these days—by assuring me that you have lately heard this system eloquently defended by a female philosopher. What can women expect from it but contempt? Next to polygamy, it would prove

the most certain method of destroying the domestic happiness of the sex, as well as their influence and respectability in society. But some of the dear creatures love to talk of what they do not understand, and usually show their eloquence to the greatest advantage, by taking the wrong side of a question.

Yours truly,

J. B.

LETTER XXI.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

L. Castle, July 30.

FROM selfishness to jealousy there is but one step, or rather there is none; for jealousy of a certain sort is but selfishness in another form. How different this passion as I have felt it, and as I see it shown! In some characters it is the symptom of amiable and exquisite sensibility; in others, of odious coldness and contraction of heart. In some of our sex it is, you know, my Gabrielle, a delicate fear, a tender anxiety, a proof of ardent passion; in others, it is a mere love of power, a disgusting struggle for the property of a heart, an absurd assertion of rights and prerogatives. Surely

no prejudice of education or institution can be more barbarous, than that which teaches a wife, that she has an indefeasible and exclusive right, both to the affections and the fidelity of her husband. I am astonished to hear it avowed by any woman who has the slightest pretensions to delicacy of sentiment, or liberality of mind. I should expect to find this vulgar prejudice only among the downright dames, who talk of *my good man*, and lay a particular emphasis on the possessive pronoun *my*; who understand literally, and expect that their spouses should adhere punctually, to every coarse article of our strange marriage vow.

In certain points of view, my Gabrielle, jealousy is undoubtedly the strongest proof of an indelicate mind. Yet, if I mistake not, the delicate, the divine Leonora, is liable to this terrestrial pas-

sion. Yesterday evening, as I was returning from a *stroll* in the park with Mr. L——, we met Leonora; and methought she looked embarrassed at meeting us. Heaven knows there was not the slightest occasion for embarrassment, and I could not avoid being surprised at such weakness, I had almost said folly, in a woman of Leonora's sense, especially as she knows how my heart is attached. In the first moments of our intimacy my confidence was unbounded, as it ever is in those I love. Aware as I was of the light in which the prejudices of her education and her country make her view such connexions, yet I scrupled not with the utmost candour to confess the unfortunate attachment which had ruled my destiny. After this confidence, do not suspicion and jealousy on her part appear strange? Were Mr. L—— and I

shut up for life in the same prison, were we left together upon a desert island, were we alone in the universe, I could never think of him. And Leonora does not see this! How the passions obscure and degrade the finest understandings! But perhaps I do her injustice, and that she felt nothing of what her countenance expressed. It is certain, however, that she was silent for some moments after she joined us, from what cause she knows best—so was Mr. L——, I suppose from English awkwardness—so was I, from pure astonishment. At length in pity of Leonora I broke the silence. I had recourse to the beauties of nature.

What a heavenly evening! said I. We have been listening to the song of the birds, enjoying this fresh breeze of nature's perfumes. Leonora said something about the superiority of nature's

perfumes to those of art; and observed, how much more agreeable the smell of flowers appears in the open air, than in confined rooms. Whilst she spoke she looked at her husband, as she continually does, for assent and approbation. He assented, but apparently without knowing what he was saying; and only by one of his English monosyllables. I alone was at ease.

Can any thing be more beautiful, continued I, looking back, than the soft mellow foliage of those woods, and the exquisite tints of their rich colouring? What delicious melancholy such an evening spreads over the heart!—What reflections!—What recollections!—O! Leonora, look at the lights upon that mountain, and the deep shadows upon the lake below. Just such scenes

have I admired, by such have I been entranced in Switzerland.

Leonora put her arm within mine—she seemed to have no objection to my thoughts going back to Switzerland—I sighed—she pressed my hand affectionately—I wiped the starting tear from my eye. Mr. L—— looked at me with something like surprise—whilst I repeated involuntarily,

"I mourn, but ye woodlands, I mourn not for you,
For morn is approaching your charms to restore,
Perfum'd with fresh fragrance, and glitt'ring with dew."

I paused, recollecting myself, struck with *the ridicule* of repeating verses, and of indulging feelings in which no one perhaps sympathised.

Those are beautiful lines, said Leonora.

That poem has always been a favourite of mine.

And of mine also, said Mr. L——.

I prefer Beattie's Hermit to all other hermits, said Leonora.

I was not in a mood calmly to discuss with her a point of criticism—I walked on in reverie: but in this I was not allowed to indulge—Mr. L—— asked if I could not recollect some more of the Hermit—I pleaded the worst memory in the world—a memory that can never recollect any poem perfectly by rote—only the touches of genius or sensibility, that strike me—and those are so few!

But in this poem there are so many, said Leonora.—I am sure she insisted only to please her husband, and pleaded against her real feelings purposely to conceal them. He persisted in his re-

quest with more warmth than usual. I was compelled to rouse myself from my reverie, and to call back my distant thoughts. I repeated all that I could recollect of the Poem. Mr. L—— paid me a profusion of compliments upon the sweetness of my voice, and my taste in repeating poetry. He was pleased to find that my manner and tones gave an Italian expression to English poetry, which to him was a peculiar charm. It reminded him of some Signora, whom he had known at Florence. This was the first time I had learned that he had been abroad. I was going to explore the foreign field of conversation, which he thus opened; but just at that moment Leonora withdrew her arm from mine, and I fancied that she coloured. This might be only my fancy, or the natural effect of her stoop-

ing to gather a flower. We were now within sight of the castle. I pointed to one of the turrets over a Gothic window, upon which the gleams of the setting sun produced a picturesquely romantic effect —my glove happened to be off—and Leonora unluckily saw that her husband's eyes were fixed upon my arm instead of the turret to which I was pointing. 'Twas a trifle which I never should have noticed, had she not forced it upon my attention. She actually turned pale. I had the presence of mind not to put on my glove.

I must observe more accurately; I must decide whether this angelic Leonora is or is not susceptible of the mortal passion ycleped jealousy. I confess my curiosity is awakened.

Adieu, my ever amiable Gabrielle.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XXII.

Mrs. C—— to Miss B——.

August 3d.

NATURAL historians inform us, that a bee can see but an inch before his nose. Now because I am as busy as a bee, Lady Olivia takes it for granted that I am as short sighted: but I can assure her Ladyship that my sphere of vision is not quite so contracted. I can see perhaps further than she wishes, even to the ultimate object of all her manœuvres: and farther still, I can see, Lady Olivia, what you cannot see, that you will be completely duped, and make yourself thoroughly ridiculous. To all which I have not the slightest objection; for by your operations Leonora's eyes will be

opened at last, and she will see that I was right in neither loving nor pitying you for *your exquisite and unfortunate sensibility.*

My dear Margaret, affairs begin to wear a new aspect, still however under the planet Venus.

> "And if weak women go astray,
> Their stars are more in fault than they."

We must come round to a belief in judicial astrology again, because there is no other way by which a heroine can preserve consistency, and this system will always answer their purpose; for our stars may as well bear the blame of a hundred irresistible passions as of one. A mixture of judicial astrology and metaphysics, properly applied, is sovereign for a tender conscience. But I have not yet told you the fact which led to this digression.

Here is Olivia in the midst of her *belle passion* for an absent lover consoling herself by coquetting with all her might to captivate another swain; and who do you think he is? The husband of that dearest friend, for whom, a short month ago, she would (witness present) have sacrificed a billion of lives. But this is all right and according to rule. There must be the strongest possible motives against an attachment to make it interesting by the violence of the struggles.

Fool that I am, why do I talk of struggles or attachment in explaining the conduct of a woman who has no heart! So kind as Leonora has been to her! So fondly attached as Leonora is to her husband! Olivia deserves . . . . . But I will not waste indignation; contempt will do better, and I am cool

enough to feel it, and to anticipate with pleasure the *dénouement* of this pretty romance. Mr. L—— hates coquetry, loves Leonora, and does not dislike *persiflage*: he is amusing himself at Lady Olivia's expense with the most plausible gravity imaginable, and he will play his part till he has developed to his wife the character of a woman whom he cannot wish to be her companion; he defends Olivia to me upon all occasions; but I am not imposed upon, I see his whole play.

Yours affectionately,

HELEN C——,

LETTER XXIII.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

August 10th.

WHEN the passions are asleep we are apt to fancy they are dead. I verily thought that curiosity was dead within me, it had lain so long dormant while stronger and tenderer sentiments waked in full activity; but now that absence and distance from their object lull them to temporary repose, the vulgar subordinate passions are roused and take their turn to reign. My curiosity was so strongly excited upon the subject of Leonora's jealousy, that I could not rest, without attempting to obtain satisfaction. Blame me not, dearest Gabrielle, for in my situation you would inevitably have

done the same, only that you would have done it with more address; with that peculiar, inimitable address, which I envy above all your accomplishments. But address is a delicate native of France, and though it may now and then exist as a stranger, I doubt whether it can ever be naturalized in our rude climate. All the attempts I have made are however encouraging enough—you shall judge. My object was, to ascertain the existence or nonexistence of Leonora's jealousy. I set about it with a tolerably careless assurance, and followed up the hint, which accident had thrown out for my ingenuity to work upon. You remember, or at least I remember, that Leonora withdrew her arm from mine, and stooped to gather a flower at the moment when her husband mentioned Florence, and the resemblance of my

voice to that of some Italian charmer. The next day I happened to play some of my sweetest Italian airs, and to accompany them with my voice. The music-room opens into the great hall: Leonora and her husband were in the hall, talking to some visitors. The voices were soon hushed, as I expected, by the magic sounds—but . . . what I did not expect . . . Leonora was the first who led the way into the music-room. Was this affectation? These *simple* characters sometimes baffle all the art of the decipherer. I should have been clear that it was affectation, had Leonora been prodigal of compliments on my performance, but she seemed only to listen for her own pleasure, and left it to Mr. L—— to applaud. Whilst I was preparing to play over again the air which pleased him most, the two little boys

came running to beg Leonora would follow them to look at some trifle, some coloured shadow, upon the garden-wall, I think they said: she let them lead her off, leaving *us* together. This did not seem like jealousy. I was more at a loss than ever, and determined to make fresh and more decisive experiments. Curiosity you know is heightened by doubt. To cure myself of curiosity it is necessary therefore to put my mind out of doubt. Admire the practical application of metaphysics. But metaphysics always make you yawn.

Adieu for to day.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XXIV.

Mrs. C—— to Miss B——.

August 17, ——.

DEAR Margaret; an uncle of mine, who ever since I can remember seemed to me cut out for an old bachelor, writes me word that he is just going to be married, and that I must grace his nuptials. I cannot refuse, for he has always been very kind to me, and we have no right to cut people out for old bachelors. That I am sorry to leave Leonora it is superfluous to tell you; but this is the melancholy part of the business, on which I make it a principle to dwell as little as possible.

Lady Olivia must be heartily glad that I am going, for I have been terribly troublesome to her by my gayety and

my *simplicity*. I shall lose all the pleasure I had promised myself in seeing the *dénouement* of the comedy of *The Sentimental, Coquet*, or, *The Heroine unmasked*.

I made Leonora almost angry with me this morning, by a hint or two I gave upon this subject. She looked so very grave, that I was afraid of my own thoughts, and I dared not explain myself farther. Intimate as I am with her, there are points on which I am sure that she would never make me her confidante. I think that she has not been in her usual good spirits lately; and though she treats Olivia with uniform kindness, and betrays not, even to my watchful eyes, the slightest symptom of jealousy, yet I suspect that she sees what is going forward, and she suffers in secret. Now if she would let me explain myself, I could set her

heart at ease, by the assurance that Mr. L—— is only acting a part. If her affection for her husband did not almost blind her, she would have as much penetration as I have—which you will allow, my dear Margaret, is saying a great deal.

Yours affectionately,

HELEN C——.

LETTER XXV.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

August 22, —

CONGRATULATE me, my charming Gabrielle, upon being delivered from the unfeeling gayety of that friend of Leonora, that Helen of whom I formerly sent you a too flattering portrait. Her departure relieves me from many painful sensations. Dissonance to a musical ear is not more horrid, than want of harmony between characters to the soul of sensibility. Between Helen and me there was a perpetual discord of ideas and sentiments, which fatigued me inexpressibly. Besides, I began to consider her as a spy upon my actions. But there, I believe,

I did her injustice, for she was too much occupied with her own trifling thoughts to have any alarming powers of observation.

Since her departure we have been very gay. Yesterday we had a large company at dinner. Some of the neighbouring families, whom I expected to find mere country visitors, that were to come a dozen miles to show their antediluvian finery, retire half an hour after dinner, spoil coffee with cream, say nothing, but at their appointed hours rise, ring for their superb carriages, and go home by moonlight. However, to my astonishment I found myself in a society of well-bred, well informed persons; the women ready to converse, and the men, even after dinner, not impatient to get rid of them. Two or three of the company had travelled, and I was glad to talk to

them of Italy, Switzerland, and France. Mr. L—— I knew would join in this conversation. I discovered that he came to Florence just as I was leaving it. I was to have been at our Ambassador's one evening when he was there; but a head-ache prevented me. These little coincidences you know, my Gabrielle, draw people closer together. I remember to have heard of a Mr. L—— at Florence, who was a passionate admirer of our sex. He was then unmarried. I little thought that this was the same person. Beneath a cold exterior, these Englishmen often conceal a wondrous quantity of enthusiasm—volcanoes under snow.—Curiosity, dear indefatigable curiosity, supported me through the labour of clearing away the snow, and I came to indubitable traces of mey-

guished and unextinguishable fire. The character of L—— is quite different from what I had imagined it to be. It is *an excellent study.* We had a long and interesting conversation upon national manners; especially upon those of the females of all nations. He concluded by quoting the words of your friend M. le Vicomte de Segur.

"If I were permitted to choose, I should prefer a French woman for my friend, an English woman for my wife, and a Polish lady for my mistress."

From this, it seems, that I was mistaken about the Italian Signora, or else Mr. L—— has an enlarged charity for the graces of all nations.—More subject for curiosity.

In the evening, before the company separated, we were standing on the steps

of the great hall, looking at a fine effect of moon-light, and I pointed out the shadow of the arches of a bridge. From moon-light we went on to lamp-light, and many pretty things were said about art and nature. A gentleman, who had just returned from Paris, talked of the reflection of the lamps in the Seine, which one sees in crossing the Pont-royal, and which, as he said, appear like a colonade of fire. As soon as he had finished *prosing* about his colonade, I turned to Mr L——, and asked if he remembered the account which Coxe the traveller gives of the Polish Princess Zartoriska's charming *fête champêtre* and the illuminated rustic bridge of one arch, the reflection of which in the water was so strong as to deceive the eye, and to give the whole the appearance of a brilliant circle suspended in the air. Mr.

L—— seemed enchanted with my description, and eagerly said, that he would some night have a bridge in his improvements illuminated, that *we* (half-gallant Englishman!) might see the effect. I carelessly replied, that probably it would have a good effect: I would then have talked on other subjects to the lady next me: but an Englishman cannot suddenly change the course of his conversation. Mr. L—— still persisted in asking a variety of questions about this Polish fête. I excused myself; for if you satisfy curiosity you are no longer sublime; besides it is so pedantic to remember *accurately* any thing one meets with in books. I assured him that I had forgotten the particulars.

My countrymen are wondrous persevering, when once roused. This morning, when I came down to breakfast, I

found Mr. L—— with a volume of Coxe's travels in his hand. He read aloud to Leonora the whole description of the illuminated gardens, and of a Turkish tent of curious workmanship, and of a pavilion supported by pillars ornamented with wreaths of flowers. Leonora's birth-day is some time in the next month; and her husband, probably to prevent any disagreeable little feelings, proposed that the *fête champêtre* he designed to give should be on that day. She seemed rather to discourage the thing. Now to what should this indifference be attributed? To jealousy I should positively decide; but that two reasons oppose this idea, and keep me in doubt. She was not within hearing at the moonlight conference, and knew nothing of my having mentioned the Polish fête, or of her husband's having proposed

to illuminate the bridge for me. Besides, I remember, the other day when she was reading the new French novel you sent me, she expressed great dislike to the sentimental fêtes which the lover prepares for his mistress. I would give more than I dare tell you, my dear Gabrielle, to be able to decide whether she is jealous of me or not. But where was I?—Mr. L——, who had set his heart upon the *fête champêtre*, persisted, and combated her antipathy by reason. Foolish man! he should have tried compliments, or—caresses—if I had not been present.

"My dear Leonora," said he, "I think you carry your dislike to these things too far. They are more according to the French than to the English taste, I know; but we should not be influenced by national prejudice. I detest the os-

tentation and the affectation of sentiment as much as you can; but where the real feeling exists, every mode of showing kindness is agreeable. You must let us have this little fête on your birthday. Besides the pleasure it will give me, I really think it is useful to mix ideas of affection with amusement."

She smiled most graciously, and replied, that she would with pleasure accept of kindness in any form from him. In short, she was willing to have the fête, when it was clearly explained that she was to be the object of it. Is not this proof positive of jealousy? And yet my curiosity is not thoroughly satisfied. I must go on; for Leonora's sake I must go on. When I have been assured of the truth, I shall know how to conduct myself; and you, who know my heart, will do me the justice to believe, that when I

am convinced of my friend's weakness, I shall spare it with the most delicate caution: but till I am convinced, I am in perpetual danger of blundering by my careless, inadvertent innocence. You smile, Gabrielle; dear malicious Gabrielle, even in your malice you are charming! Adieu! Pray for the speedy extinction of my curiosity.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XXVI.

Leonora to her Mother.

August 29th.

YOU say, my dearest mother, that of late my letters have been more constrained, and less cheerful than usual, and you conjure me not to conceal from you any thing which may concern my happiness. I have ever found you my best and most indulgent friend, and there is not a thought or feeling of my mind, however weak or foolish, that I desire to conceal from you. No one in this world is more—is so much interested in my happiness, and in every doubtful situation I have always been accustomed to apply to your unerring judgment for assistance. Your strength

of mind, your enlightened affection, would support and direct me, would at once show me how I ought to act, and inspire me with courage and fortitude sufficient to be worthy of your esteem, and of my own. At no period of my life, not even when my heart first felt the confused sensations of a passion that was new to it, did I ever want or wish for a friend so much as at this instant: and yet I hesitate whether I ought to ask even your advice, whether I ought to indulge myself in speaking of my feelings even to my mother. I refrained from giving the slightest intimation of them to my dear Helen, though she often led to this subject, and seemed vexed by my reserve. I thought it not right to accept of her sympathy. From her kindness I had every con-

solation to expect, but no assistance from her counsels, because she does not understand my husband's character, and I could plainly perceive that she had an erroneous idea so fixed in her fancy, as to prevent her seeing things in their true light. I am afraid of imputing blame where I most wish to avoid it: I fear to excite unjust suspicions; I dread that if I say the whole you will imagine that I mean much more than I say.

I have not been quite well lately, and my mind probably is more apt to be alarmed than it would be if my health were stronger. All that I apprehend may exist merely in my own distempered imagination. Do not then suppose others are to blame, when perhaps I only am in fault.

I have for some time past been dissatisfied with myself, and have had reason to be so: I do not say this from any false humility, I despise that affectation; but I say it with a sincere desire, that you may assist me to cure myself of a weakness, which, if it were to grow upon my mind, must render me miserable, and might destroy the happiness of the person I love best upon earth. You know that I am not naturally or habitually of a jealous temper, but I am conscious of having lately felt a disposition to jealousy. I have been spoiled by the excessive attention which my husband paid to me in the first year of our marriage.

You warned me not to fancy that he could continue always a lover. I did

not, at least I tried not to expect such an impossibility. I was prepared for the change, at least I thought I was: yet now the time, the inevitable time is come, and I have not the fortitude to bear it as I ought. If I had never known what it was to possess his love, I might perhaps be content with his friendship. If I could feel only friendship for him, I should now, possibly, be happy. I know that I have the first place in his esteem; I do believe —I should be miserable indeed if I did not believe—that I have the first place in his affection. But this affection is certainly different from what it once was. I wish I could forget the difference. No: I retract that wish; however painful the comparison, the recollection of times that are past is delightful to my heart. Yet my dear mo-

ther, if such times are never to return, it would be better for me to forget that they have ever been. It would be wiser not to let my imagination recur to the past, which could then tend only to render me discontented with the present and with the future. The FUTURE! how melancholy that word sounds to me! what a dreary length of prospect it brings to my view! How young I am, how many years may I have to live, and how little motive have I left in life! Those which used to act most forcibly upon me, have now scarcely power to move my mind. The sense of duty, it is true, raises me to some degree of exertion: I hope that I do not neglect the education of the two children whom my poor sister bequeathed to my care. When my mind was at ease, they were

my delight; but now I feel that I am rather interrupted than interested by their childish gayety and amusements.

I am afraid that I am growing selfish; and I am sure that I have become shamefully indolent. I go on with certain occupations every day from habit, not from choice; my mind is not in them. I used to flatter myself that I did many things from a sense of duty and of general benevolence, which I am now convinced were done merely from a particular wish to please, and to make myself more and more beloved by the object of my fondest affection. Disappointed in this hope, I sink into indolence, from which the desire to entertain my friends is not sufficient to rouse me. Helen has been summoned away; but I believe I told you that Mr. and Mrs. F**, whose company is

peculiarly agreeable to my taste, and Lady M***** and her amiable daughters, and your witty friend *****, are with us. In such society I am ashamed of being stupid; yet I cannot contribute to the amusement of the company, and I feel surprised at their animation and sprightliness. It seems as if I was looking on at dancers without hearing any music. Sometimes I fear that any silence should be observed, and then I begin to talk without well knowing what I am saying. I confine myself to the most common-place subjects, and hesitate, from the dread of saying something quite foreign to the purpose. What must Mr. L—— think of my stupidity? But he does not, I believe, perceive it: he is so much occupied with—with other objects.—I am glad that he does not see all that passes in my mind, for he

might despise me if he knew that I am so miserable. I did not mean to use so strong an expression; but now it is written, I will not blot it out, lest you should fancy something worse than the reality. I am not however yet so weak as to be seriously *miserable* when I have no real cause to be so. The truth is ———. Now you know this phrase is a tacit confession that all that has been said before is false. The real truth is ———. By my prefacing so long you may be sure that I have reason to be ashamed of this real truth's coming out. The real truth is, that I have been so long accustomed to be the first and *only* object of my husband's thoughts, that I cannot bear to see him think of any thing else. Yes, *things* I can bear, but not *persons*—female persons.—And there is

one person here who is so much more agreeable and entertaining than I am, that she engrosses very naturally almost all his attention. I am not *envious* I am sure; for I could once admire all Lady Olivia's talents and accomplishments, and no one could be more charmed than I was with her fascinating manners and irresistible powers of pleasing;—but when those irresistible powers may rob me of the heart of my beloved husband—of the whole happiness of my life—how can I admire them? All I can promise is to preserve my mind from the meanness of suspicion. I can do my rival justice. I can believe, and entreat you to believe, that she does not wish to be my rival: that she is perfectly innocent of all design to injure me, and that she is not aware of the impres-

sion she has made. I, who know every change of Mr. L——'s countenance, every inflexion of his voice, every turn of his mind, can see too plainly what she cannot discern. I should indeed have thought, that no woman, whom he distinguished or preferred in any degree, could avoid perceiving it, his manner is so expressive, so flattering: but perhaps this appears so only to me; a woman who does not love him, may see things very differently. Lady Olivia can be in no danger, because her heart, fortunately for me, is prepossessed in favour of another; and a woman whose heart is occupied by one object, is absolutely blind, as I well know, to all others. With this security I ought to be satisfied; for I believe no one inspires a lasting passion without sharing it.

I am summoned to give my opinion about certain illuminations and decorations for a *fête champêtre*, which Mr. L—— is so kind as to give in honour of my birth-day—just at the time I am complaining of his neglect!——No, dear mother, I hope I have not complained of *him*, but of *myself*: and it is your business to teach your daughter to be more reasonable. Write soon and ufully to

Your affectionate

LEONORA.

LETTER XXVII.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

Sept. 12th.

THIS fine fête champêtre is over.—Expect no description of it from me, Gabrielle, for I am horridly out of humour. The whole pleasure of the evening was destroyed by the most foolish circumstance imaginable. Leonora's jealousy is now evident to more eyes than mine. No farther doubt upon the subject can remain. My curiosity is satisfied; but I am now left to reproach myself for having gone so far to ascertain what I ought to have taken for granted. All these good English wives are jealous; so jealous, that no one, who has any pretensions to beauty, wit, or *amiability*, can live with them. They

can have no *society* in our sense of the word, of course they must live shut up in their own dismal houses with their own stupid families, the faithful husband and wife sitting opposite to each other in their own chimney corners, yawning models of constancy! And this they call virtue! How the meanest vices usurp the name of virtue! Leonora's is a jealousy of the most illiberal and degrading species; a jealousy of the temper, not of the heart. She is too cold to feel the passion of love.——She never could be in love; of that I am certain.——She is too reasonable, too prudish. Besides, to imagine that she could be in love with her own husband, and after eighteen months marriage! the thing is absurd! the thing is impossible! No, she deceives herself or him, or

both, if she pretends that her jealousy arises from love, from what you and I, Gabrielle, understand by the word. Passion, and passion only, can plead a just excuse for its own excesses. Were Leonora in love, I could pardon her jealousy. But now I despise it. Yes, with all her high reputation, and *imposing* qualities, I must think of her with contempt. And now that I have given vent to my feelings with that freedom in which I ever indulge myself in writing to you, my amiable Gabrielle, chosen friend of my heart, I will compose myself, and give you a rational account of things.

You know that I am said to have some taste. Leonora makes no pretensions to any. Wishing, I suppose, that her fête should be as elegant as

possible, she consulted me about all the arrangements and decorations. It was I that did every thing. My skill and taste were admired by the whole company, and especially by Mr. L——. He was in remarkably good spirits at the commencement of the evening; quite gay and gallant: he certainly paid me a great deal of attention, and it was natural he should; for besides being his guest, I was undoubtedly the most elegant woman present. My fame had gone abroad; I found that I was the object of general attention. To this I have been tolerably well accustomed all my life; enough at least to prevent me from giving any visible sign of being moved by admiration in whatever form it comes; whether in the polite foreign glance, or the

broad English stare. The starers enjoyed their pleasure, and I mine: I moved and talked, I smiled or was pensive, as though I saw them not; nevertheless the homage of their gaze was not lost upon me. You know, my charming Gabrielle, one likes to observe the *sensation* one produces amongst new people. The incense that I perceived in the surrounding atmosphere, was just powerful enough to affect my nerves agreeably: that languor which you have so often reproached me for indulging in the company of what we call *indifferents*, gradually dissipated; and as poor R * * * used to say of me, I came from behind my cloud like the sun in all its glory. I was such as you have seen me, Gabrielle, in my best days, in my best moments, in my

very best style. I wonder what could excite me to such a waste of powers. L—— seemed inspired too; he really was quite agreeable, and showed me off almost as well as R * * * himself could have done. I had no idea that he had this species of talent. You will never know of what my countrymen are capable, for you are out of patience with the statues the first half hour: now it takes an amazing time to animate them; but they can be waked into life, and I have a pride in conquering difficulties.—There were more men this night in proportion to the women than one usually sees in English company, consequently it was more agreeable. I was surrounded by an admiring audience, and my conversation of course was sufficiently gene-

ral to please all, and sufficiently particular to distinguish the man whom I wished to animate. In all this you will say there was nothing to put one out of humour, nothing very mortifying:—but stay, my fair philosopher, do not judge of the day till you see its end.—Leonora was so hid from my view by the crowd of adorers, that I really did not discern her, or suspect her jealousy. I was quite natural; I thought only of myself; I declined all invitations to dance, declaring that it was so long since I had danced an English country dance, that I dared not expose my awkwardness. French country dances were mentioned, but I preferred conversation. At last L—— persecuted me to try a Polish dance with him,—a multitude of voices overpow-

ered me. I have not the talent which some of my countrywomen possess in such perfection of being obstinate about trifles. When I can refuse with grace, 'tis well; but when that is no longer possible, it is my principle, or my weakness, to yield. I was surprised to find that L—— danced admirably. I became animated. You know how dancing animates me, when I have a partner who *can* dance—a thing not very common in this country.—We ended by *waltsing*, first in the Polish, and afterwards in the Parisian manner. I certainly surpassed myself, I flew, I was borne upon the wings of the wind, I floated on the notes of the music. Animated or languid in every gradation of grace and sentiment, I abandoned myself to the

inspiration of the moment; I was all soul, and the spectators were all admiration. To you, my Gabrielle, I may speak thus of myself without vanity: you know the sensation I was accustomed to produce at Paris; you may guess then what the effect must be here, where such a style of dancing has all the captivation of novelty. Had I doubted that my *success* was complete, I should have been assured of it by the faces of some prudes amongst the matrons, who affected to think that the walse was *too much*. As L—— was leading, or rather supporting me to my seat, for I was quite exhausted, I overheard a gentleman, who was at no great distance from the place where Leonora was standing, whisper to his neighbour, "Le Valse extrême est la volupté

permise." I fancy Leonora overheard these words, as well as myself, for my eyes met hers at this instant, and she coloured, and directly looked another way. L—— neither heard nor saw any thing of all this: he was intent upon procuring me a seat; and an Englishman can never see or think of two things at a time. A few minutes afterwards, whilst he was fanning me, a young awkward creature, quite a stranger in this country, came up to me, and dropping her novice curtsey, said, "Here's a ring, my Lady, I found on the grass; they tell me it is yours, my Lady!"

"No, my good girl, it is not mine," said I.

"It is Lady Leonora's," said Mr. L——.

At the sound of her name Leonora came forward.

The girl looked alternately at us.

"Can you doubt," cried Colonel A——, "which of these ladies is Mr. L——'s wife?"

"O no, Sir; this is she *to be sure*," said the girl, pointing to me.

What there was in the girl's accent, or in L——'s look, when she pronounced the words, or in mine, or in all three together, I cannot exactly describe: but Leonora felt it. She turned as pale as death. I looked as unconscious as I could. L—— went on, fanning me, without seeing his wife's change of countenance. Leonora—would you believe it?—sunk upon a bench behind us, and fainted. How her husband started, when he felt her catch by his arm as she fell! He

threw down the fan, left me, ran for water—"O, Lady Leonora! Lady Leonora is ill!" exclaimed every voice. The consternation was wonderful. They carried her Ladyship to a spot where she could have freer air. I was absolutely in an instant left alone, and seemingly as much forgotten as if I had never existed! I was indeed so much astonished, that I could not stir from the place where I stood; till recollecting myself, I pushed my way through the crowd, and came in view of Leonora just as she opened her eyes. As soon as she came to herself, she made an effort to stand, saying that she was quite well again, but that she would go into the house and repose herself for a few minutes. As she rose, a hundred arms were offered at once to her assistance. She stepped forward; and

to my surprise, and I believe to the surprise of every body else, took mine, made a sign to her husband not to follow us, and walked quickly towards the house. Her woman, with a face of terror, met us, as we were going into Lady Leonora's apartment, with salts and hartshorn, and I know not what in her hands.

"I am quite well, quite well again; I do not want any thing; I do not want any thing. I do not want you, Mason," said Leonora. "Lady Olivia is so good as to assist me. I am come in only to rest for a few minutes."

The woman gave me an evil look, and left the room. Never did I wish any thing more than that she should have staid. I was absolutely so embarrassed, so distressed, when I

found myself alone with Leonora, that I knew not what to say. I believe I began with a sentence about the night air, that was very little to the purpose. The sight of some baby-linen which Susan had been making suggested to me something which I thought more appropriate.

"My dear creature!" said I, "why will you fatigue yourself so terribly, and stand so much and so long in your situation?"

Leonora neither accepted nor rejected my interpretation of what had passed. She made no reply; but fixed her eyes upon me as if she would have read my very soul. Never did I see or feel eyes so expressive or so powerful as hers were at this moment. Mine absolutely fell beneath them. What deprived me of

presence of mind I know not; but I was utterly without common sense. I am sure I changed colour, and Leonora must have seen it through my rouge, for I had only the slightest tinge upon my cheeks. The consciousness that she saw me blush disconcerted me beyond recovery; it is really quite unaccountable; I trembled all over as I stood before her; I was forced to have recourse to the harts-horn and water, which stood upon the table. Leonora rose and threw open the window to give me fresh air. She pressed my hand, but rather with an air of forgiveness than of affection; I was mortified and vexed; but my pride revived me.

"We had better return to the company, as soon as possible I be-

lieve," said she, looking down at the moving crowd below.

"I am ready to attend you, my dear," said I coldly, "whenever you feel yourself sufficiently rested and composed."

She left the room, and I followed. You have no idea of the solicitude with which the people hoped she was *better*—and *well*—and *quite well*, &c. What amazing importance a fainting fit can sometimes bestow! Her husband seemed no longer to have any eyes or soul but for her. At supper, and during the rest of the night, she occupied the whole attention of every body present. Can you conceive any thing so provoking? But L—— must be an absolute fool!—Did he never see a woman

faint before?—He cannot pretend to be in love with his wife—I do not understand it.—But this I know, that he has been totally different in his manner towards me these three days past.

And now that my curiosity is satisfied about Leonora's jealousy, I shall absolutely perish with ennui in this stupid place. Adieu, dearest Gabrielle! how I envy you! The void of my heart is insupportable. I must have some passion to keep me alive. Forward any letters from poor R***, if he has written under cover to you.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XXVIII.

The Duchess of ——— to her Daughter.

Sept. 5th.

TAKE courage, my beloved daughter; take courage. Have a just confidence in yourself and in your husband. For a moment he may be fascinated by the arts of an unprincipled woman; for a moment she may triumph over his senses, and his imagination; but of his esteem, his affection, his heart, she cannot rob you. These have been, ought to be, will be yours. Trust to your mother's prophecy, my child. You may trust to it securely: for, well as she loves you—and no mother ever loved a daughter better—she does not soothe you with mere words of doating fondness; she

speaks to you the language of reason and of truth.

I know what such a man as Mr. L—— must esteem and love; I know of what such a woman as my daughter is capable, when her whole happiness, and the happiness of all that is dear to her, are at stake. The loss of temporary admiration and power, the transient preference shown to a despicable rival, will not provoke you to imprudent reproach, nor sink you to helpless despair. The arts of an Olivia might continue to deceive your husband, if he were a fool; or to please him, if he were a libertine: but he has a heart formed for love, he cannot therefore be a libertine: he is a man of superiour abilities, and knows women too well to be a dupe. With a penetrating and discriminative judgment of character, he is a nice

observer of female manners; his taste is delicate even to excess; under a cold exterior he has a vivid imagination and strong sensibility; he has little vanity, but a superabundance of pride; he wishes to be ardently loved, but this he conceals; it is difficult to convince him that he is beloved, and scarcely possible to satisfy him by any common proofs of attachment. A coquet will never attach Mr. L——. The admiration which others might express for her charms and accomplishments, would never pique him to competition: far from seeking "to win her praise whom all admire," he would disdain to enter the lists with the vulgar multitude: a heart in which he had a probability of holding only divided empire, would not appear to him worth the winning. As a coquet, whatever may be her talents, graces, ac-

complishments, and address, you have nothing seriously to fear from Lady Olivia.

But, my dear, Mr. L——'s mind may be in a situation to require amusement. That species of apathy which succeeds to passion is not, as the inexperienced imagine, the death of love, but the necessary and salutary repose from which it awakens refreshed and revived. Mr. L——'s passion for you has been not only tender, but violent, and the calm which inevitably succeeds should not alarm you.

When a man feels that his fondness for a wife is suspended, he is uneasy in her company, not only from the sense of decreased pleasure, but from the fear of her observation and detection. If she reproach him, affairs become worse; he blames himself, he fears to give pain,

whenever he is in her presence: if he attempt to conceal his feelings, and to appear what he is no longer, a lover, his attempts are awkward; he becomes more and more dissatisfied with himself, and the person who compels him to this hypocrisy, who thus degrades him in his own eyes, must certainly be in danger of becoming an object of aversion. A wife, who has sense enough to abstain from all reproaches, direct or indirect, by word or look, may reclaim her husband's affections: the bird escapes from his cage, but returns to his nest.

I am glad that you have agreeable company at your house; they will amuse Mr. I——, and relieve you from the necessity of taking a share in any conversation that you dislike. Our witty friend * * * * * * * * will supply your

share of conversation; and as to your silence, remember that witty people are always content with those who *act audience.*

I rejoice that you persist in your daily occupations. To a mind like yours, the sense of performing your duty will, next to religion, be the firmest support upon which you can rely.

Perhaps, my dear, that even when you read this you will still be inclined to justify Lady Olivia, and to conceal from your heart the suspicions which her conduct excite. I am not surprised that you should find it difficult to believe that one to whom you have behaved so generously should treat you with treachery and ingratitude. I am not surprised, that you who feel what it is to love, should think that a woman

whose heart is occupied by attachment to one object must be incapable of thinking of any other. But love in such a heart as yours is totally different from what it is in the fancy of these heroines. In their imagination the objects are as fleeting as the pictures in the clouds chased by the wind.

From Lady Olivia expect nothing: depend upon every thing from yourself. When you become, as you soon must, completely convinced that the woman in whom your unsuspecting soul confided is utterly unworthy of your esteem, refrain from all imprudent expressions of indignation. I despise, you will soon hate, your rival; but in the moment of detection think of what is due to yourself, and act as calmly as if you had never loved her. She will suffer no pain from the loss of your friendship:

she has not a heart that can value it. Probably she is envious of you. All these women desire to mortify those whom they cannot degrade to their own level: and I am inclined to suspect that this malevolent feeling, joined to the want of occupation, may be the cause of her present conduct. Her manœuvres will not ultimately succeed. She will be deserted by Mr. L——, disappointed, and disgraced, and your husband will be more yours than ever. When this happy moment comes, my Leonora; when your husband returns, preferring yours to all other society, then will be the time to exert all your talents, all your charms, to prove your superiority in every thing, but most in love. The soothings of female tenderness in certain situations, have power not only to calm the feelings of self-reproach, but to

diffuse delight over the soul of man. The oil, which the skilful mariner throws upon the sea, not only smooths the waves in the storm, but when the sun shines, spreads the most beautiful colours over the surface of the waters.

My dear daughter, though your mother writes seemingly at her ease, you must not fancy that she does not feel for you. Do not imagine, that in the coldness of extinguished passions, and in the pride of counselling age, your mother expects to charm agony with words. No, my child, I am not so absurd, so cruel. Your letter forced tears from eyes, which are not used like sentimental eyes to weep upon every trifling occasion. My first wish was to set out immediately to see you; but whatever consolation or pleasure my company might afford,

I believe it might be disadvantageous to you in your present circumstances. I could not be an hour in the room with this Lady Olivia without showing some portion of the indignation and contempt that I feel for her conduct. This warmth of mine might injure you in your husband's opinion. Though you would have too strong a sense of propriety, and too much dignity of mind, to make complaints of your husband to me, or to any one living; yet it might be supposed that your mother was your confidante in secret, and your partisan in public: this might destroy your domestic happiness. No husband can or ought to endure the idea of his wife's caballing against him. I admire and shall respect your dignified silence.

And now fare you well, my dearest child. May God bless you! If a mother's prayers could avail, you would be the happiest of human beings. I do, without partiality, believe you to be one of the best and most amiable of women.

LETTER XXIX.

Leonora to her Mother.

Sept. 10th.

HAD your letter, my dearest mother, reached me a few hours sooner, I should not have exposed myself as I have done.

Yesterday, at our *fête champêtre*, you would have been ashamed of me. I am ashamed of myself. I did the very reverse of what I ought, of what I would have done, if I had been fortified by your counsel. Instead of being calm and dignified, I was agitated beyond all power of control. I lost all presence of mind, all common sense, all recollection.

I know your contempt for swoon-

ing heroines. What will you say, when you hear that your daughter fainted—fainted in public? I believe, however, that, as soon as I recovered, I had sufficient command over myself to prevent the accident from being attributed to—to—to the real cause, and I hope that the very moment I came to my recollection, my manner towards Lady Olivia was such as to preclude all possibility of her being blamed or even suspected. From living much abroad, she has acquired a certain freedom of manner, and latitude of thinking, which expose her to suspicion; but of all serious intention to injure me, or to pass the bounds of propriety, I totally acquit her. She is not to blame for the admiration she excites; nor is she

to be the sufferer for my weakness of mind or of health.

Great and unreasonable folly I am sure I showed—but I shall do so no more.

The particular circumstances I need not explain; you may be assured, that wherever I think it right to be silent, nothing shall tempt me to speak: but I understood by the conclusion of your letter, that you expect me to preserve an absolute silence upon this subject in future: this I will not promise. I cannot conceive that I, who do not mean to injure any human being, ought, because I am unhappy, and when I am most in want of a friend, to be precluded from the indulgence of speaking of what is nearest my heart to that dear, safe, most enlightened and honourable of friends,

who has loved, guided, instructed and encouraged me in every thing that is right from my infancy. Why should I be refused all claim to sympathy, why must my thoughts and feelings be shut up in my own breast, and why must I be an isolated being, proscribed from commerce with my own family, with my beloved mother; to whom I have been accustomed to tell every feeling and idea as they rose? No, to all that is honourable I will strictly conform; but by the superstition of prudence I do not hold myself bound.

Nothing could be kinder than my husband's conduct to me the evening after I was taken ill. He left home early this morning; he is gone to meet his friend General B——, who

has just returned from abroad. I hope that Mr. L—— will be absent only a few days; for it would be fatal to my happiness if he should find amusement at a distance from home. His home at all events shall never be made a cage to him; when he returns I will exert myself to the utmost to make it agreeable. This I hope can be done without obtruding my company upon him, or putting myself in competition with any person. I could wish that some fortunate accident might induce Lady Olivia to leave us before Mr. L——'s return. Had I the same high opinion of her generosity that I once formed, had I the same perfect confidence in her integrity and in her friendship for me, I would go this moment and tell her all that passes

in my heart; no humiliation of my vanity would cost me any thing if it could serve the interests of my love. No mean pride could stand in my mind against the force of affection. But there is a species of pride which I cannot, will not renounce, believing as I do, that it is the companion, the friend, the support of virtue. This pride, I trust, will never desert me; it has grown with my growth; it was implanted in my character by the education which my dear mother gave me; and now, even by her it cannot be eradicated. Surely I have misunderstood one passage in your letter. You cannot advise your daughter to restrain just indignation against vice from any motive of policy or personal interest. You say to me, "In the moment of detection

think of what is due to yourself, and act as calmly as if you had never loved her." If I *could*, I would not do this. Contempt shown by virtue is the just punishment of vice, a punishment which no selfish consideration should mitigate. If I were convinced that Lady Olivia were guilty, would you have me behave to her as if I believed her to be innocent? My countenance, my voice, my principles, would revolt from such mean and pernicious hypocrisy, degrading to the individual, and destructive to society.

May I never more see the smile of love on the lips of my husband, nor its expression in his eyes, if I so degrade myself in my own opinion and in his! Yes, in his: for would not he, would not any man of sense or delicacy recur to that idea so common

with his sex, and so just, that if a woman will sacrifice her sense of honour to her passions in one instance, she may in another. Would he not argue, "If she will do this for me because she is in love with me, why not for a new favourite, if time or accident should make me less an object of passion?"—No—I may lose my husband's love. This would be my misfortune: but to forfeit his esteem would be my fault; and, under the remorse which I should then have to endure, I am persuaded that no power of art or nature could sustain my existence.

So much for myself. As to the general good of society, that, I confess, is not at this moment the uppermost consideration in my mind; but I will add a few words on that subject, lest you should imagine me to be hurried away by my

own feelings. Public justice and reason I think on my side. What would become of the good order of society or the decency of families, if every politick wife were to receive or invite, or permit her husband's mistress to reside in her house, make her a companion, an example for her daughters? What would become of conjugal virtue in either sex, if the wife were in this manner not only to connive at the infidelity of her husband, but to encourage and provide for his inconstancy? If she enters into bonds of amity and articles of partnership with her rival, with that person by whom she has been most injured, instead of being the dignified sufferer, she becomes an object of contempt.

My dearest mother, my most respected friend, my sentiments on this subject cannot essentially differ from yours. I

must have mistaken your meaning. Pray write quickly, and tell me so; and forgive, if you cannot approve of, the warmth with which I have spoken.

I am your truly affectionate
And grateful daughter,
LEONORA L——.

LETTER XXXI.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

Sept. 20, ——.

MY amiable Gabrielle, I must be faithful to my promise of writing to you every week, though this place affords nothing new either in events or sentiment. Mr. L——'s absence made this castle insupportably dull. A few days ago he returned home, and met me with an easy kind of indifference, provoking enough to a woman who has been accustomed to excite some sensation. However, I was rejoiced at this upon Leonora's account. She was evidently delighted, and her spirits and affections seemed to overflow involuntarily upon all around her; even to me her manner became quite frank and cordial, almost

caressing. She is really handsome when she is animated, and her conversation this evening quite surprised me. I saw something of that playfulness, those light touches, that versatility of expression, those words that mean more than meet the ear; every thing, in short, that could charm in the most polished foreign society. Leonora seemed to be inspired with all the arts of conversation by the simple instinct of affection. What astonished me most, was the grace with which she introduced some profound philosophical remarks. "Such pearls," said Mr. L——, "come from the deep!"

With all these talents, what might not Leonora be in proper hands! But now she is nothing except to her husband and a few intimate friends.—However, this is not my affair. Let me go on to what con-

cerns myself. You may believe, my dear Gabrielle, that I piqued myself upon showing at least as much easy indifference as was shown to me.—Freedom encourages freedom. As there was no danger of my being too amiable, I did not think myself bound in honour or sentiment to keep myself in the shade: but I could not be as brilliant as you have seen me at your *soirées*; the magic circle of adorers, the inspiring power of numbers, the eclat of public *représentation*, were wanting. I retired to my own apartment at night, quite out of humour with myself; and Josephine, as she undressed me, put me still further out of patience by an ill-timed history of a dispute she had with Leonora's Swiss servant. The Swiss and Josephine it seems came to high words in defence of their mistresses'

charms. Josephine provoked the Swiss by saying that his lady might possibly be handsome if she were dressed in the French taste, *mais qu'elle étoit bien Angloise*, and would be quite another thing if she had been at Paris. The Swiss retorted by observing, that Josephine's lady had indeed learnt in perfection at Paris *the art of making herself up*, which was quite necessary to a beauty *un peu passée*. The words were not more agreeable to me than they had been to Josephine. I wonder at her assurance in repeating them—Un peu passée! Many a woman in England, ten, fifteen years older than I am, has inspired a violent passion; and it has been observed, that power is retained by these mature charmers longer than conquests can be preserved by inexperienced beau-

ties. There are women who have learnt to combine, for their own advantage, and for that of their captives, all the pleasures and *conveniencies* of society, all that a thorough knowledge of the world can give—women who have a sufficient attention to appearances, joined to a real contempt for all prejudices, especially that of constancy—women who possess that knowledge of the human heart, which well compensates transient bloom; who add the expression of sentiment to beautiful features, and who, as divine Parnell says, employ

"Gay smiles to comfort, April showers to move,
And all the nature, all the art of Love."

——"Un peu passée." The Swiss is impertinent, and knows nothing of the matter. His master knows but little more. He would however know infinitely more if I could take the trouble

to instruct him; to which I am almost tempted for want of something better to do. Adieu, my Gabrielle. R***'s silence is perfectly incomprehensible.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XXXII.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

Sept. 26, ——.

SO, my amiable Gabrielle, you are really interested in my letters, *though written during my English exile,* and you are curious to know whether any of *the potent spells* can wake into life this man of marble. I candidly confess you would inspire me with an ambition to raise my poor countrymen in your opinion, if I were not restrained by the sacred sentiment of friendship, which forbids me to rival Leonora *even* in a husband's opinion.

However, Josephine, who feels herself a party concerned ever since her battle with the Swiss, has piqued herself upon dressing

me with exquisite taste. I am every day *mise à ravir!*—and with such perfection of art, that no art appears—all is negligent simplicity. I let Josephine please herself, for you know I am not bound to be frightful because I have a friend whose husband may chance to turn his eyes upon my figure, when he is tired of admiring hers. I rallied L—— the other day upon his having no eyes or ears but for his wife. Be assured I did it in such a manner, that he could not be angry. Then I went on to a comparison between the *facility* of French and English society. He admitted that there was some truth and more wit in my observations. I was satisfied. With these reasonable men, the grand point for a woman is to amuse them—they can have logic from their own sex. But,

my Gabrielle, I am summoned to the *sallon*, and must finish my letter another day.

Heavens! can it be a fortnight since I wrote a line to my Gabrielle!—Where was I?—"With these reasonable men the grand point for a woman is to amuse them,"—True—most true!—L——, believing himself only amused with my lively nonsense, indulged himself with it continually. I was to believe only what he believed. Presently he could not do without my conversation for more than two hours together. What was I to do, my Gabrielle? I walked out to avoid him. He found me in the woods—rallied me on my taste for solitude, and quoted Voltaire.

"How charming is solitude! But we always want some one to whom we

may exclaim—How charming is solitude!"

This led to a metaphysical conversation, half playful, half serious:—the distinction which a man sometimes makes to his conscience between thinking a woman entertaining, and feeling her interesting, vanishes more easily, and more rapidly, than he is aware of—at least in certain situations. This was not an observation I could make to my companion in the woods, and he certainly did not make it for himself. It would have been vanity in me to have broken off our conversation, lest he should fall in love with me—it would have been blindness not to have seen that he was in some danger. I thought of Leonora—and sighed—and did all that was in my power to put him upon his guard.—By way of preservative, I frankly made

him a confession of my attachment to R***. This I imagined would put things upon a right footing for ever: but on the contrary, by convincing him of my innocence, and of my having no designs on his heart, this candour has, I fear, endangered him still more; yet I know not what to think—his manner is so variable towards me—I must be convinced of what his sentiments are, before I can decide what my conduct ought to be. Adieu, my amiable Gabrielle. I wait for something decisive with an inexpressible degree of anxiety—I will not now call it curiosity.—Apropos, does R*** wish that I should forget that he exists? What is this business that detains him? But why do I condescend to inquire?

OLIVIA

LETTER XXXIII.

General B—— to Mr. L——.

MY DEAR L——, Sept. 27.

I SEND you the horse to which you took a fancy. He has killed one of his grooms, and lamed two; but you will be his master, and I hope he will know it.

I have a word to say to you on a more serious subject. Pardon me if I tell you that I think you are a happy man, and excuse me if I add, that if you do not keep yourself so I shall not think you a wise one. A good wife is better than a good for nothing mistress.—A self-evident proposition!—A stupid truism! Yes; but if every man who knows a self-evident proposition when he sees

it on paper, always acted as if he knew it, this would be a very wise and a very happy world; and I should not have occasion to write this letter.

You say, that you are now amusing yourself at the expense of a finished coquette; take care that she does not presently divert herself at yours.—— "*You are proof against French coquetry and German sentiment.*"——Granted—but a fine woman?—and your own vanity?—But you have no vanity.——You call it pride then, I suppose. I will not quarrel with you for a name. Pride, properly managed, will do your business as well as vanity. And no doubt Lady Olivia knows this as well as I do. I hope you may never know it better.

I am, my dear friend,

Truly yours,

J. B.

LETTER XXXIV.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

Oct. 1.

ADVISE me, dearest Gabrielle; I am in a delicate situation; and on your judgment and purity of heart I have the most perfect reliance. Know then, that I begin to believe that Leonora's jealousy was not so absolutely absurd as I at first supposed. She understood her husband better than I did. I begin to fear that I made a serious impression whilst I meant only to amuse myself. Heaven is my witness, I simply intended to satisfy my curiosity, and that once gratified, it was my determination to respect the weakness I discovered. To love Leonora, as once I imagined I

could, is out of my power; but to disturb her peace, to destroy her happiness, to make use of the confidence she has reposed in me, the kindness she has shown by making me an inmate of her house—my soul shudders at these ideas. No—if her husband really loves me I will fly. Leonora shall see that Olivia is incapable of treachery—that Olivia has a soul generous and delicate as her own, though free from the prejudices by which she is fettered. To Leonora a husband is a lover—I shall consider him as such, and respect her *property*. You are so little used, my dear Gabrielle, to consider a husband in this point of view, that you will scarcely enter into my feelings: but put yourself in my situation, allow for nationality of principle, and I am persuaded you would act as I shall. Spare me your raillery; seri-

ously, if Leonora's husband is in love with me, would you not advise me, my dearest friend, to fly him "far as pole from pole." Write to me, I conjure you, my Gabrielle—write instantly, and tell me whether R*** is now at Paris. I will return thither immediately if you advise it. My mind is in such confusion, I have no power to decide; I will be guided by your advice.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XXXV.

Madame de P—— to Olivia.

Paris.

ADVICE! my charming Olivia! do you ask me for advice? I never gave or took advice in my life, except for *les vapeurs noirs.* And your understanding is so far superior to mine, and you comprehend the characters of these English so much better than I do, that I cannot pretend to counsel you. This Lady Leonora is inconceivable with her passion for her own husband; but how ridiculous to let it be suspected! If her heart is so tender, cannot she, with all her charms, find a lover on whom to bestow it, without tormenting that poor Mr. L——. Evidently he is tired of

her; and I am sure I should be worn to death were I in his place. Nothing so tiresome as love without mystery and without obstacles. And this must ever be the case with conjugal love. Eighteen months married, I think you say, and Lady Leonora expects her husband to be still at her feet! And she wishes it! Truly she is the most unreasonable woman upon earth—and the most extraordinary; but I am tired of thinking of what I cannot comprehend.

Let us pass on to Mr. L——. By your last letters I should judge that he might be an agreeable man if his wife were out of the question. Matrimonial jealousy is a new idea to me; I can judge of it only by analogy. In affairs of gallantry I have sometimes seen one of the parties continue to love when the other has become indifferent, and then

they go on tormenting one another and being miserable, because they have not the sense to see that a fire cannot be made of ashes. Sometimes I have found romantic young people persuade themselves, that they can love no more because they can love one another no longer; but if they had sufficient courage to say—I am tired—and I cannot help it—they would come to a right understanding immediately, and part on the best terms possible, each eager to make a new choice, and to be again in love and happy. All this to be done with decency of course. And if there be no scandal, where is the harm? Can it signify to the universe whether Mons. Un-tel likes Madame Une-telle or Madame Une-autre? Provided there is love enough, all the world is in good humour, and that is the essential point; for with-

out good humour, what becomes of the pleasures of society? As to the rest, I think of inconstancy, or *infidelity* as it is called, much as our good la Fontaine did—

"Quand on le sait c'est peu de chose—quand on ne le sait pas ce n'est rien."

To promise to love one person eternally! What a terrible engagement! It freezes my heart even to think of it. I am persuaded, that if I were bound to love him for life, I should detest the most amiable man upon earth in ten minutes—a husband more especially. Good heavens! how I should abhor M. de P—— if I saw him in this point of view. On the contrary, now I love him infinitely—that is to say, as one loves a husband. I have his interests at heart, and his glory. When I thought

he was going to prison I was in despair. I was at home to no one but *Brave-et-Tendre*, and to him, only to consult on the means of obtaining my husband's pardon. M. de P—— is sensible of this, and on my part I have no reason to complain of his liberality. We are perfectly happy, though we meet perhaps but for a few minutes in the day; and is not this better than tiring one another for four and twenty hours? When I grow old . . . . if ever I do . . . he will be my best friend. In the mean time I support his credit with all my influence. This very morning I concluded an affair for him, which never could have succeeded, if the intimate friend of the minister had not been also my lover. Now, why cannot your Lady Leonora and her Mr. L—— live on the same sort of terms? But if English

manners will not permit of this, I have nothing more to say. Above all things a woman must respect opinion, else she cannot be well received in the world. I conclude this is the secret of Lady Leonora's conduct. But then jealousy! —no woman I suppose is bound, even in England, to be jealous in order to show her love for her husband. I lose myself again in trying to understand what is incomprehensible.

As to you, my dear Olivia, you also amaze me by talking of *crimes*, and *horror*, and *flying from pole to pole* to avoid a man because you have made him at last find out that he has a heart! You have done him the greatest possible service: it may preserve him perhaps from hanging himself next November—that month in which, according to Voltaire's philosophical calendar, English-

men always hang themselves, because the atmosphere is so thick and their ennui so heavy. Lady Leonora, if she really loves her husband, ought to be infinitely obliged to you for averting this danger. As to the rest, your heart is not concerned, so you can have nothing to fear; and as for a platonic attachment on the part of Mr. L——, his wife, even according to her own rigid principles, cannot blame you.

Adieu, my charming friend! Instead of laughing at your fit of prudery, I ought to encourage your scruples, that I might profit by them. If they should bring you to Paris immediately, with what joy should I embrace my Olivia, and how much gratitude should I owe to the jealousy of Lady Leonora L——!

R*** is not yet returned. When I have any news to give you of him, de-

pend upon it you shall hear from me again. Accept, my interesting Olivia, the vows of my most tender and eternal friendship.

GABRIELLE DE P——.

LETTER XXXVI.

Olivia to Madame de P——

Oct. 15, ——.

YOUR charming letter, my Gabrielle, has at once revived my spirits and dissipated all my scruples; you mistake, however, in supposing that Leonora is in love with her husband: more and more reason have I every hour to be convinced that Leonora has never known the passion of love; consequently her jealousy was, as I at first pronounced it to be, the selfish jealousy of matrimonial power and property. Else why does it subside, why does it vanish, when, if it were a jealousy of the heart, it has now more provocation, infinitely more than when it appeared in full force? Leonora could see that her husband distinguished me

at a *fête champêtre*; she could see what the eyes of others showed her; she could hear what envy whispered, or what scandal hinted; she was mortified, she was alarmed even to fainting by a public preference, by a silly country girl's mistaking me for *the wife*, and doing homage to me as to the Lady of the manor; but Leonora cannot perceive in the object of her affection the symptoms that mark the rise and progress of *a real love*. Leonora feels not the little strokes, which would be fatal blows to the peace of a truly delicate mind; she heeds not "the trifles light as air," which would be confirmation strong to a soul of genuine sensibility. My influence over the mind of L—— increases rapidly, and I shall let it rise to its acme before I seem to notice it. Leonora, reassured, I suppose, by a few

flattering words, and more perhaps by an exalted opinion of her own merit, has lately appeared quite at her ease, and blind to all that passes before her eyes. It is not for me to dissipate this illusion prematurely, it is not for me to weaken this confidence in her husband. To an English wife this would be death. Let her foolish security then last as long as possible. After all, how much anguish of heart, how many pangs of conscience, how much of the torture of pity am I spared by this callous temper in my friend! I may indulge in a little harmless coquetry without danger to her peace, and without scruple enjoy the dear possession of power.

Oct. 18, ——.

"Say, for you know," charming Gabrielle, what is the delight of obtaining

power over the human heart? Let the Lords of the creation boast of their power to govern all things; to charm these Governors be ours, Gabrielle. Let the logicians of the earth boast their power to regulate the world by reason; to intoxicate and humble proud reason to the dust beneath our feet, Gabrielle, be ours.—And who shall blame in us this ardour for universal dominion? If they are men I call them tyrants—if they are women I call them hypocrites—and the two vices which I most detest are tyranny and hypocrisy. Frankly I confess, that I feel in all its restless activity the passion for general admiration. I cannot conceive, can you, Gabrielle, a pleasure more transporting than the perception of extended and extending dominion. The struggle of the rebel

heart for freedom makes the war more tempting, the victory more glorious, the triumph more splendid. Secure of your sympathy, ma belle Gabrielle, I shall not fear to tire you by my commentaries.

Oct. 21, ——.

Male coquetry justifies female retaliation to any imaginable extent. Upon this principle, on which I have seen you act so often, and so successfully, my amiable Gabrielle, I shall now intrepidly proceed. This man makes a show of resistance; be it at his own peril: he thinks that he is gaining power over my heart, whilst I am preparing torments for his; he fancies that he is throwing chains round me, whilst I am rivetting fetters from which he will in vain attempt to escape. He is proud,

and has the insanity of desiring to be exclusively beloved, yet affects to set no value upon the preference that is shown to him, appears satisfied with his own approbation, and stoically all-sufficient to his own happiness. Leonora does not know how to manage his temper, but I do. The suspense however in which he keeps me is tantalising: he shall pay for it hereafter: I had no idea, till lately, that he had so much self-command. At times he has actually made me doubt my own power. At certain moments I have been half-tempted to believe that I had made no serious impression, that he had been only amusing himself at my expense, and for Leonora's gratification; but upon careful and cool observation I am convinced that his indifference is affected, that all his stoicism will prove

vain. The arrow is lodged in his heart, and he must fall, whether he turns upon the enemy in anger, or flies in dismay.

— 23.

My pride is exasperated. I am not accustomed to such obstinate resistance. I really almost hate this invincible man and . . . . . strange inconsistency of the human heart! . . . . almost love him. Heaven and pride preserve me from such a weakness! But there is certainly something that piques and stimulates one's feelings in this species of male coquetry. L—— understands the business better than I thought he could. One moment my knowledge of the arts of his sex puts me on my guard; the next my sensibility exposes me in the most terrible

manner. Experience ought to protect me, but she only shows me the peril and my inability to escape. Ah! Gabrielle, without a heart how safe we should be, how dangerous to our lovers! But cursed with sensibility, we must, alas! submit to our fate. The habit of loving, *le besoin d'aimer*, is more powerful than all sense of the folly and the danger. Nor is the tempest of the passions so dreadful as the dead calm of the soul. Why did R*** suffer my soul to sink into this ominous calm? The fault is his; let him abide the consequence. Why did he not follow me to England? Why did he not write to me? or when he did write, why were his letters so cold, so spiritless? When I spoke of divorce, why did he hesitate? Why did he reason when he should have only felt?

Tell him, my tender, my delicate friend, these are questions which the heart asks, and which the heart only can answer. Adieu.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XXXVII.

Madame de P—— to Olivia.

Paris.

JE suis excedée! mon cœur. Alive, and but just alive, after such a day of fatigues! All morning from one minister to another! then home to my toilette! then a great dinner with a number of foreigners, each to be distinguished! then au Feydeau, where I was obliged to go to support poor S——'s play, which would be really insupportable, if it were not for the finest music in the world, which, after all, the French music certainly is. There was a violent party against the piece; and we were so late, that it was just on the point of perishing. My ears have not yet recovered

from the horrid noise. In the midst of the tumult I fortunately, by a master-stroke, turned the fortune of the night. I spied the shawl of an English woman hanging over the box. This, you know, like scarlet to the bull, is sufficient to enrage the Parisian pit. To the shawl I directed the fury of the mob of critics. Luckily for us, the Lady was attended only by an Englishman, who of course chose to assert his right not to understand the customs of any country, or submit to any will but his own. He would not permit the shawl to be stirred. A bas! à bas! resounded from below. The uproar was inconceivable. You would have thought that the house must have come down. In the mean time the piece went on, and the shawl covered all its defects. Admire my generalship. T—— tells

me I was born for a general; yet I rather think my forte is negotiation.

But I have not yet come to your affairs, for which alone I could undergo the fatigue of writing at this moment. Guess, my Olivia, what apparition I met at the door of my box to night. But the enclosed note will save you the trouble of guessing. I could not avoid permitting him to slide his billet doux into my hand as he put on my shawl. Adieu. I must refuse myself the pleasure of conversing longer with my sweet friend. Fresh toils await me. Madame la Grande will never forgive me if I do not appear for a moment at her soirée: and la petite Q—— will be jealous beyond recovery if I do not give her a moment: and it is Madame R——'s night. There I must be; for all the Ambassadors, as usual, will be

there; and as some of them, I have reason to believe, go on purpose to meet me, I cannot disappoint their Excellencies. My friends would never forgive it. I am positively quite weary of this life of eternal bustle; but once in the eddy, one is carried round and round; there is no stopping. Adieu, adieu. I write under the hands of Victoire. O that she had your taste to guide her, and to decide my too vacillating judgment: we should then have no occasion to dread even the elegant simplicity of Madame R——'s toilette.

GABRIELLE DE P——.

LETTER XXXVIII.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

Oct. 31, ——.

MY Gabrielle, I have read R * * * *'s note enclosed in your charming sprightly letter. What a contrast! So cold! so formal! A thousand times rather would I not have heard from him, than have received a letter so little in unison with my feelings. He talks to me of business. Business! What business ought to detain a man a moment from the woman he loves? The interests of his ambition are nothing to me. What are all these to love? Is he so mean as to hesitate between them? then I despise him! and Olivia can never love the being she despises!

Does R*** flatter himself that his power over my heart is omnipotent? Does he imagine that Olivia is to be slighted with impunity? Does R*** think that a woman who has even nominally the honour to reign over his heart, cannot meditate new conquests? O credulous vanity of man! He fancies perhaps that he is secure of the maturer age of one who fondly devoted to him her inexperienced youth. "Security is the curse of fools." Does he in his wisdom deem a woman's age a sufficient pledge for her constancy? He might every day see examples enough to convince him of his error. In fact, the age of women has nothing to do with the number of their years. Possibly, however, the gallant gentleman may be of opinion with Leonora's Swiss, that Lady Olivia is *un peu passée.*

Adieu, my dear friend; you, who always understand and sympathise in my feelings, you will express them for me in the best manner possible. I shall not write to R***. You will see him; and Olivia commits to you what to a woman of delicacy is more dear than her love—her just resentment.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XXXIX.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

Nov. 14, ——.

PITY me, dearest Gabrielle, for I am in need of all the pity which your susceptible heart can bestow. Never was woman in such a terrible situation! Yes, Gabrielle, this provoking, this incomprehensible, this too amiable man, has entangled your poor friend past recovery. Her sentiments and sensations must henceforward be in eternal opposition to each other. Friendship, gratitude, honour, virtue, all in tremendous array, forbid her to think of love; but love, imperious love, will not be so defied; he seizes upon his victim, and now, as in all the past, will be the ruler, the

tyrant of Olivia's destiny. Never was confusion, amazement, terror, remorse, equal to mine, Gabrielle, when I first discovered that I loved him. Who could have foreseen, who could have imagined it? I meant but to satisfy an innocent curiosity, to indulge harmless coquetry, to gratify the natural love of admiration, and to enjoy the possession of power. Alas! I felt not that whilst I was acquiring ascendancy over the heart of another I was beguiled of all command over my own. I flattered myself that when honour should bid me stop I could pause without hesitation, without effort: I promised myself, that the moment I should discover that I was loved by the husband of my friend I should fly from him for ever. Alas! it is no longer time—to fly from him is no longer in my power. Oh Gabrielle! I

love him. He knows that I love him. Never did woman suffer more than I have done since I wrote to you last. The conflict was too violent for my feeble frame. I have been ill—very ill—a nervous fever brought me nearly to the grave. Why did I not die? I should have escaped the deep humiliation, the endless self-reproach to which my future existence is doomed.—Leonora!—Why do I start at that name? Oh! there is horror in the sound! Even now perhaps she knows and triumphs in my weakness. Even now perhaps her calm insensible soul blesses itself for not being made like mine. Even now perhaps her husband doubts whether he shall accept Olivia's love, or sacrifice your wretched friend to Leonora's pride. Oh Gabrielle, no words can describe what I suffer! But I must be calm, and explain the

progress of this fatal passion. Explain! Heavens! how shall I explain what I cannot recollect without heart-rending anguish and confusion! Oh Gabrielle! pity

Your distracted

OLIVIA.

LETTER XL.

Madame de P—— to Olivia.

Monday.

MY dear romantic Olivia! you must have a furious passion for tormenting yourself, when you can find matter for despair in your present situation. In your place I should rejoice to find that in the moment an old passion had consumed itself, a new one, fresh and vigorous, springs from its ashes. My charming friend, understand your own interests, and do not be the dupe of those fine phrases that we are obliged to employ to deceive others. Rail at Cupid as much as you please to the men in public, *par façon*, but always remember for your private use, that love is

essential to our existence in society. What is a woman when she neither loves nor is loved? a mere *personage muet* in the drama of life. Is it not from our lovers that we derive our consequence? Even a beauty without lovers is but a queen without subjects. A woman who renounces love, is an abdicated sovereign, always longing to resume her empire when it is too late; continually forgetting herself like the pseudo-philosophic Christina, talking and acting as though she had still the power of life and death in her hands. A tyrant without guards or slaves. A most awkward, pitiable, and ridiculous personage. No, my fair Olivia, let us never abjure love. Even when the reign of beauty passes away, that of grace and sentiment remains. As much delicacy as you please; without delicacy there is no

grace, and without a veil beauty loses her most captivating charms. I pity you, my dear, for having let your veil be blown aside *malheureusement*. But such accidents will happen. Who can control the passions or the winds? After all, *l'erreur d'un moment* is not irretrievable, and you reproach yourself too bitterly, my sweet friend, for your involuntary injustice to Lady Leonora. Assuredly it could not be your intention to sacrifice your repose to Mr. L——. You loved him against your will, did you not? And it is, you know, by the intention that we must judge of actions: the positive harm done to the world in general is in all cases the only just measure of criminality. Now what harm is done to the universe, and what injury can accrue to any individual, provided you keep your own counsel? As long as

your friend is deceived she is happy; it therefore becomes your duty, your virtue, to dissemble. I am no great casuist, but all this appears to me self-evident; and these I always thought were your principles of philosophy. My dear Olivia, I have drawn out my whole store of metaphysics with some difficulty for your service; I flatter myself I have set your poor distracted head to rights. One word more—for I like to go to the bottom of a subject—when I can do so in two minutes. Virtue is desirable because it makes us happy; consequently, to make ourselves happy is to be truly virtuous. Methinks this is sound logic.

To tell you the truth, my dear Olivia, I do not well conceive how you have contrived to fall in love with this half-frozen Englishman. 'Tis done how-

ever—there is no arguing against facts; and this is only one proof more of what I have always maintained, that destiny is inevitable, and love irresistible. Voltaire's charming inscription on the statue of Cupid is worth all the volumes of reasoning and morality that ever were or ever will be written:—

> "Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître:
> Il l'est, le fut, ou le doit être."

Banish melancholy thoughts, my dear friend; they serve no manner of purpose but to increase your passion. Repentance softens the heart; and every body knows, that what softens the heart disposes it more to love: for which reason I never abandon myself to this dangerous luxury of repentance. Mon Dieu! Why will people never profit

by experience? And to what purpose do they read history? Was not la Valliere ever penitent and ever transgressing? ever in transports or in tears? You at all events, my Olivia, can never become a Carmelite or a Magdalen. You have emancipated yourself from superstition: but whilst you ridicule all religious orders, do not inflict upon yourself their penances. The habit of some of the orders has been thought becoming. The modest costume of a nun is indeed one of the prettiest dresses one can wear at a masquerade ball, and it might even be worn without a mask, if it were fashionable: but nothing that is not fashionable can be becoming.

Adieu, my adorable Olivia: I will send you by the first opportunity your Lyons gown, which is really charming.

GABRIELLE DE P——.

LETTER XLI.

Olivia to Madame de P——.

Nov. 30th, ——.

YOUR truly philosophical letter, my infinitely various Gabrielle, infused a portion of its charming spirit into my soul. My mind was fortified and elevated by your eloquence. Who would think that a woman of such a lively genius could be so profound? and who could expect from a woman, who has passed her life in the world, such original and deep reflections? You see you were mistaken when you thought that you had no genius for philosophic subjects.

After all that has been said by metaphysicians about the existence and seat

of the moral sense, I think I can solve every difficulty by a new theory. You know some philosophers suppose the moral sense to be intuitive and inherent in man: others who deny the doctrine of innate ideas, treat this notion of innate sentiments as equally absurd. There they certainly are wrong, for sentiments are widely different from ideas, and I have that within me which convinces my understanding that sentiments must be innate, and proportioned to the delicacy of our sensibility. No person of common sense or feeling can doubt this. But there are other points which I own puzzled me till yesterday. Some metaphysicians would seat the moral sense inherently in the heart, others would place it intuitively in the brain, all would confine it to the soul; now in my opinion it resides primarily and principally in the

nerves, and varies with their variations. Hence the difficulty of making the moral sense a universal guide of action, since it not only differs in many individuals, but in the same person at different periods of their existence, or (as I have often experienced) at different hours of the day. All this must depend upon the mobility of the nervous system: upon this may *hinge* the great difficulties which have puzzled metaphysicians respecting consciousness, identity, &c. If they had attended less to the nature of the soul, and more to the system of the nerves, they would have avoided innumerable errors, and probably would have made incalculably important discoveries. Nothing is wanting but some great German genius to bring this idea of a moral sense in the nerves into fashion. Indeed if our friend Madame *** would

mention it in the notes to her new novel, it would introduce it in the most satisfactory manner possible to all the fashionable world abroad, and we take our notions in this country implicitly from the continent. As for you, my dear Gabrielle, I know you cut the gordian knot at once, by referring, with your favourite moralist, every principle of human nature to self-love. This does not quite accord with my ideas; there is something harsh in it, that is repugnant to my sensibility; but you have a stronger mind than I have, and perhaps your theory is right.

"You tell me I contradict myself continually," says the acute and witty Duke de Rochefoucault: "No, but the human heart, of which I treat, is in perpetual contradiction to itself." Permit me to avail myself of this answer, dear

Gabrielle, if you should accuse me of contradicting in this letter all that I said to you in my last. A few hours after I had dispatched it the state of my nerves changed, I saw things of course in a new light, and repented having exposed myself to your raillery by writing in such a magdalen strain. My nerves were more in fault than I. When one's mind or one's nerves grow weak, the early associations and old prejudices of the nursery recur, and tyrannise over one's reason: from this evil your liberal education and enviable temperament have preserved you; but have charity for my feminine weakness of frame, which too often counteracts the masculine strength of my soul. Now that I have deprecated your ridicule for my last nervous nonsense, I will go on in a more rational manner. However my better

judgment might have been clouded for a moment, I have recovered strength of mind enough to see that I am in no way to blame for any thing that has happened. If a man is amiable, and if I have taste and sensibility, I must see and feel it. "To love," as I remember your friend G****** once finely observed to you, "to love is a crime only in the eyes of demons, or of priests who resemble demons." This is a general proposition to which none but the prejudiced can refuse their assent: and what is true in general must be true in particular. The *accident*, I use the term philosophically, not popularly, the accident of a man's being married, or, in other words, having entered imprudently into a barbarous and absurd civil contract, cannot alter the nature of things. The essence of truth cannot be affected by the varia-

tion of external circumstances. Now the proper application of metaphysics frees the mind from vulgar prejudices, and dissipates the baby terrors of an ill-educated conscience. To fall in love with a married man, and the husband of your intimate friend! How dreadful this sounds to some ears! even mine were startled at first, till I called reason to my assistance. Then I had another difficulty to combat——to own, and own unasked, a passion to the object of it, would shock the false delicacy of those who are governed by common forms, and who are slaves to vulgar prejudices: but a little philosophy liberates our sex from the tyranny of custom, teaches us to disdain hypocrisy, and to glory in the simplicity of truth.

Josephine had been perfuming my hair, and I was sitting reading at my

toilette, the door of my dressing-room happened to be half open; L—— was crossing the gallery, and as he passed I suppose his eye was caught by my hair, or perhaps he paused a moment, I am not certain how it was—my eyes were on my book.

Ah! vous avez raison, Monsieur, c'est la plus belle chevelure! Mais entrez donc, Monsieur, cried Josephine—whom I can never teach to comprehend or respect English customs—Eh! entrez, entrez, Monsieur, Madame est à sa toilette.

As I looked up, I could not forbear smiling at the extreme ease and decision of Josephine's manner, and the excessive doubt and anxiety in the gentleman's appearance. My smile, which, Heaven knows, meant no encouragement, decided him; timidity instantly gave way

to joy, he entered. What was to be done? I could not turn him out again; I was not answerable for any foolish conclusions he might draw from what he ought in politeness to have considered as a thing of course. All I could do was to blame Josephine for being a Frenchwoman. To defend her, and flatter me, was the gentleman's part; and, for an Englishman, he really acquitted himself with tolerable grace. Josephine at least was pleased, and she found such perpetual employment for Monsieur, and his advice was so necessary, that there was no chance of his departure: so we talked of French *toilettes*, &c. &c. in French for Josephine's edification: L—— paid me some compliments upon the recovery of my looks after my illness—I thought I looked terribly languid—but he assured me that

this languor in his eyes was an additional grace; I could not understand this; he fancied that must be because he did not express himself well in French; he explained himself more clearly in English, which Josephine, you know, does not understand, so that she was now forced to be silent, and I was compelled to take my share in the conversation. L—— made me comprehend, that languor indicating sensibility of heart was to him the msot touching of female charms; I sighed—and took up the book I had been reading; it was the new novel which you sent me, dear Gabrielle; I talked of it, in hopes of changing the course of the conversation; alas! this led to one far more dangerous; he looked at the passage I had been reading. This brought us back to sensibility again—to sentiments and descriptions so terribly appo-

site! we found such a similarity in our tastes! Yet L—— spoke only in general, and he preserved a command over himself, which provoked me, though I knew it to be coquetry; I saw the struggle in his mind, and was determined to force him to be candid, and to enjoy my triumph. With these views I went farther than I had intended. The charm of sensibility he had told me was to him irresistible. Alas! I let him perceive all the weakness of my heart.—Sensibility is the worst time-keeper in the world. We were neither of us aware of its progressive motion. The Swiss—my evil genius—the Swiss knocked at the door to let me know dinner was served. Dinner! on what vulgar incidents the happiness of life depends! Dinner came between the discovery of my sentiments

and that declaration of passion which I now must hear—or die.

Le dinér! mon Dieu! cried Josephine. Mais . . . finissons donc, . . . la toilette de Madame.

I heard the impertinent Swiss at the other end of the gallery at his master's door, wondering in broken English where his master could be, and conjecturing forty absurdities about his boots, and his being out riding, &c. &c. To sally forth in conscious innocence upon the enemy's spies, and to terminate the adventure as it was begun, *à la Françoise*, was my resolution. L—— and Josephine understood me perfectly.

" Eh! Monsieur de Vaud," said Josephine to the Swiss, whom we met on the landing-place of the stairs, " Madame n'est elle pas coeffé à ravir aujourd'hui? C'est que Monsieur vient d'assister

à la toilette de Madame." The Swiss bowed, and said nothing. The bow was to his master, not to me, and it was a bow of duty, not of inclination. I never saw a man look so like a machine; he did not even raise his eyes upon me or my *coeffure* as we passed.

Bah! cried Josephine, with an inexpressible accent of mingled indignation and contempt. She ran down stairs, leaving the Swiss to his stupidity. I was more afraid of his penetration. But I entered the dining-room as if nothing extraordinary had happened; and after all, you know, my dear Gabrielle, nothing extraordinary had befallen us. A gentleman had assisted at a lady's toilette. Nothing more simple, nothing more proper in the meridian of Paris; and does propriety change with meri-

dians? There was company at dinner, and the conversation was general and uninteresting: L—— endeavoured to support his part with vivacity; but he had fits of absence and silence, which might have alarmed Leonora, if she had any suspicion. But she is now perfectly secure, and absolutely blind: therefore you see there can be no danger for her happiness in my remaining where I am. For no earthly consideration would I disturb her peace of mind; there is no sacrifice I would hesitate for a moment to make to friendship or virtue, but I cannot surely be called upon to *plant a dagger in my own heart* to destroy, for ever to destroy my own felicity without advantage to my friend. My attachment to L——, as you say, is involuntary, and my love as pure as it is fervent

I have reason to believe that his sentiments are the same for me; but of this I am not yet certain. There is the danger, and the only real danger for Leonora's happiness; for whilst this uncertainty and his consequent fits of absence and imprudence last, there is hazard every moment of her being alarmed. But when L—— once decides, every thing arranges itself you know, Gabrielle, and prudence becomes a duty to ourselves and to Leonora. No word, or look, or coquetry, could then escape us; we should be unpardonable if we did not conduct ourselves with the most scrupulous delicacy and attention to her feelings. I am amazed that L——, who has really a good understanding, does not make these reflections, and is not determined by this calculation. For his, for my own, but

most for Leonora's sake, I wish that this cruel suspense were at an end. Adieu, dear and amiable Gabrielle.—These things are managed better in France.

OLIVIA.

LETTER XLII.

Mrs. C—— to Miss B——.

DEAR MARGARET, Dec. 7th, ——.

I ARRIVED here late yesterday evening in high spirits, and high hopes of surprising and delighting all the world by my unexpected appearance, but my pride was checked and my tone changed the moment I saw Leonora. Never was any human being so altered in her looks in so short a time. I had just, and but just presence of mind enough not to say so. I am astonished that it does not strike Mr. L——. As soon as she left the room I asked him if Lady Leonora had been ill? No; perfectly well! per-

fectly well!—Did not he perceive that she looked extremely ill? No; she might be paler than usual; that was all that Mr. L—— had observed. Lady Olivia, after a pause, added, that Leonora certainly had not appeared well lately, but this was nothing extraordinary in her *situation.—Situation!* Nonsense! Lady Olivia went on with sentimental hypocrisy of look and tone, saying fine things, to which I paid little attention. Virtue in words, and vice in actions! thought I. People of certain pretensions in the court of sentiment think that they can pass false virtues upon the world for real, as some ladies, entitled by their rank to wear jewels, appear in false stones, believing that it will be taken for granted they would wear nothing

but diamonds. Not one eye in a hundred detects the difference at first, but in time the hundredth eye comes, and then they must for ever hide their diminished rays. Beware! Lady Olivia, beware!

Leonora is ill, or unhappy, or both; but she will not allow that she is either. On one subject she is impenetrable; a hundred, a thousand different ways within these four and twenty hours have I led to it with all the ingenuity and all the delicacy of which I am mistress; but all to no purpose. Neither by provocation, persuasion, laughing, teasing, questioning, cross or round about, pushing, squeezing, encompassing, taking for granted, wondering, or blundering, could I gain my point. Every look guarded—

every syllable measured—yet unequivocal—

"She said no more than just the thing she ought."

Because I could find no fault I was half angry. I respect the motive of this reserve; but towards me it is misplaced, and ill judged, and it must not exist. I have often declared that I would never condescend to play the part of a confidante to any princess or heroine upon earth. But Leonora is neither princess nor heroine, and I would be her confidante, but she will not let me. Now I am punished for my pride. If she would only trust me, if she would only tell me what has passed since I went, and all that now weighs upon her mind, I could certainly be of some use.

I could and would say every thing that she might scruple to hint to Lady Olivia, and I will answer for it I would make her raise the siege. But I cannot believe Mr. L—— to be such a madman as to think of attaching himself seriously to a woman like Olivia, when he has such a wife as Leonora. That he was amusing himself with Olivia I saw, or thought I saw some time ago, and I rather wondered that Leonora was uneasy: for all husbands will flirt, and all wives must bear it, thought I. When such a coquette as this fell in his way, and made advances, he would have been more than man if he had receded. Of course I thought he must despise and laugh at her all the time he was flattering and gallanting her ladyship. This would have been fair play, and comic; but the

comedy should have ended by this time. I am now really afraid it will turn into a tragedy. I, even I! am alarmed. I must prevail upon Leonora to speak to me without reserve. I see her suffer, and I must share her grief. Have not I always done so from the time we were children; and now, when she most wants a friend, am not I worthy to share her confidence? Can she mistake friendship for impertinent curiosity? Does not she know that I would not be burthened with the secrets of any body whom I did not love? If she thinks otherwise, she does me injustice, and I will tell her so before I sleep. She does not know how well I love her.

Dec. 12, ——.

My dear Margaret, Leonora and I have had a quarrel—the first serious quarrel we ever had in our lives; and the end of it is, that she is an angel, and I am a fool. Just as I laid down my pen after writing to you, though it was long past midnight, I marched into Leonora's apartment, resolved to surprise or to force her confidence. I found her awake, as I expected, and up and dressed as I did not expect, sitting in her dressing-room, her head leaning upon her hand, dear soul! I knew what she was thinking of, she had a heap of her husband's old letters beside her. She denies that she was in tears, and I will not swear to the tears, but I think I saw signs of them notwithstanding. I spoke out; but in vain—all in vain. At last I flew

into a passion, and reproached her bitterly. She answered me with that air of dignified tenderness which is peculiar to her—"If you believe me to be unhappy, my dear Helen, is this a time to reproach me unjustly?" I was brought to reason and to tears, and after asking pardon like a foolish naughty child, was kissed and forgiven, upon a promise never to do so any more; a promise, which I hope Heaven will grant me grace and strength of mind enough to keep. I was certainly wrong to attempt to force her secret from her. Leonora's confidence is always given, never yielded; and in her, openness is a virtue, not a weakness. But I wish she would not contrive to be always in the right. In all our quarrels, in all the variations of my humour, I am obliged to end by doing homage to

her reason, as the Chinese mariners, in every change of weather, burn incense before the needle.

Your affectionate

HELEN C——.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

ERRATA.

Vol. I, page 161, line 15, *for* Zartoriska's *read* Czartoryski's.
——, —— 225, — 2, *for* sallon *read* salon.
——, —— 270, — 18, *for* de Rochefoucault *read* de la Rochefoucault.

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